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The Human Odyssey

Navigating the Twelve Stages of Life

Thomas Armstrong, PhD

AUTHOR OF *THE MYTH OF THE ADHD CHILD*

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This book is dedicated to my mother, Dorothy Beatrice Armstrong.

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Preface

I'm very excited about the publication of this new edition of *The Human Odyssey*, which I hope will reach a new generation of readers and inspire them to explore the twelve stages of life in their daily lives. As I note in the book, I've been disappointed in the past by the emotionally flat tone of virtually all human development textbooks and most popular books on the topic of the stages of life. Here we have the most amazing journey of all—the trip of our own lives—and these textbooks reduce this incredible experience to a bunch of charts, graphs, statistics, and formulaic theories. Most importantly, these conventional ideas lack a reference to spirit or soul, that ineffable quality of being human that makes us more than just a bag of dust. It is this inclusion of a spiritual dimension that, more than anything else, makes *The Human Odyssey* distinctive as a guide to the journey of life.

In this book, I suggest that we actually take *two* intertwined journeys through life, one coming *up from the body* (this is the journey that human development textbooks and the theories of Erikson, Piaget, Freud, and Kohlberg exclusively concern themselves with), and the other coming *down from the spirit* (a journey referred to mostly by poets and mystics such as Wordsworth, Steiner, Inayat Khan, and Carl Jung). Understanding *both* of these lines of development and how they interact is crucial in capturing the total picture of a human being's unfoldment through time. So while I've concerned myself, for example, with *up from the body* topics like embryology and the growth of the fetus *in utero*, I've also addressed *down from the spirit* dimensions, including the *infant exile motif* from world mythology (e.g., the journey through the fallopian tubes is reflected in the myth of the infant hero cast into a body of water). I've attempted to provide

such a dual focus on the interlaced journeys of matter and spirit for each of the twelve stages of life.

Another feature that I believe makes *The Human Odyssey* a valuable contribution to the field of human development is its practical focus. I point out in the book that each stage of life contributes something special to the human experience. Birth offers the world hope, for example, while adolescence gives us passion. Mature adulthood provides benevolence, while death and dying offer us ironically a deeper sense of "life'' itself. These "gifts'' to humanity need to be nurtured in order for them to make their full contribution to society. Hence, at the end of each chapter, I've included practical steps that readers can take to support each stage of life, firstly, within themselves (e.g., through personal psychological work), secondly, in the lives of their family and friends (e.g., through prosocial interventions), and thirdly, in the society as a whole (e.g., through philanthropy, volunteerism, and social action). I've also tried to make the stages of life especially vivid to the reader by including at the end of the book a guide to great films that have addressed the issues involved at each stage of life (e.g., *Splendor in the Grass* and *Rebel Without a Cause* for adolescence, *Umberto D*. and *Ikiru* for late adulthood).

Above all, I want readers to come away from this book with a "developmental'' perspective on life. I want them to keep in mind that the people in our lives are like travelers from different parts of the globe or citizens of different cultures. The practical day-to-day concerns of infants (e.g., "Where's mommy?" "When am I going to get fed?''), for example, are very different from those of young adults (e.g., "How do I get a job?'' "Where do I find a mate for life?''). We should treat each person according to the needs of their particular stage of life, and provide empathy and resources that can help them navigate the sometimes smooth, but often rocky terrain of the particular stage they're going through.

I also want the reader to understand that some people are more attuned to the *down from the spirit* line of development (I call them *rememberers*) while others are more attached to growth *up from the body* (I refer to them as *adapters*). *Rememberers* often have trouble adapting to the codes of their own culture (unless the culture itself is a *rememberer* culture, such as is the case with many indigenous groups). *Rememberers* need special understanding and help in order to negotiate their way through the rules, rituals, roles, and regulations of their culture (e.g., many *rememberer* kids

get labeled as ADHD or autistic and need special care in providing learning methods that honor their unique ways of perceiving the world). At the same time, there are many *adapter* personalities who, though often successful in the material world, suffer from a spiritual poverty that may leave them groundless or confused, especially during transitional periods in their lives. The practical suggestions given at the end of each chapter can help provide direction in giving both *rememberers* and *adapters* the kind of nurturing that fits their unique personality profile.

Among the sixteen books I've written, *The Human Odyssey* is closest to my heart because it emerged out of my own struggles and successes at different stages of life. The researching and writing of it took fifteen years and spanned three different stages of my life: early adulthood, midlife, and mature adulthood. And while I share personal details when they help illustrate different aspects of the life stages, the book itself is an attempt to synthesize knowledge from a wide range of fields including developmental psychology, world mythology, psychodynamic theory, anthropology, world literature, mysticism, cognitive psychology, and the arts. I hope that the story I tell in this book resonates with you and inspires you to transform yourself and those around you. So, it's time to strap yourself in, hold on to the handrails, and get ready for the amusement ride of a lifetime: the incredible journey of your own life!

Acknowledgments

I began conceiving of this project thirty-seven years ago, in 1982, when I started to teach courses in childhood, adolescent, and adult development at several San Francisco Bay Area graduate schools of psychology. I'd like to thank the people at these institutions who gave me an opportunity to integrate a psychospiritual perspective into what might otherwise have been typical college courses on human development: David Surrenda and Bryan Wittine at John F. Kennedy University's School of Consciousness Studies, Ernest Pecci and Jon Klimo at Rosebridge Graduate School, and Arthur Hastings at the California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology). I'd like to thank several administrators and faculty at the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS), where I received my PhD in East-West Psychology in 1986 (and also taught), for providing an inspiring, engaging, and encouraging learning atmosphere that was perfectly tailored to my needs as an independent learner and that helped lay some important foundations for this book: Bina Chadhuri, John Broomfield, Cathy Coleman, John Welwood, Tanya Wilkinson, Paul Herman, Ralph Metzner, DeLee Lantz, and Rowena Pattee Kryder. Thanks to the Kern Foundation for supporting research I did at CIIS that related to psychospiritual approaches to human development. Also thanks to Frank Barr, who gave me encouragement at this early stage. I began work on the proposal for this book in the early 1990s and would like to thank Janice Gallagher, who had been my editor at Jeremy Tarcher on a previous book (*In Their Own Way*), for her editing skills on some of my early efforts. I want to thank the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), for whom I wrote five books for educators between 1993 and 2006, which gave me enough financial support to spend the time it took to research and write this book. I especially want

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Thanks to Maureen Wolf at the Association for Pre- & Perinatal Psychology and Health (APPPAH), who helped me locate hard-to-find sources for the prebirth chapter, and to the film critic Charles Champlain, who gave me suggestions and encouragement for the book's filmography while I was attending the Santa Barbara Writers Conference in the summers of 1996–98. Thanks to the staff of the Santa Rosa Memorial Hospice volunteer program, especially Nina Arbour, Cheri Plattner, and Mary DeLuca, for letting me go through their training program in 2004 and giving me two brief assignments that helped me immensely with the death and dying chapter and that I mark as among the most significant experiences of my life (everyone who can, should consider spending time as a hospice volunteer sometime during their lives).

There are several people I'd like to thank for reviewing a final draft of the book and providing specific feedback, corrections, and additions to the manuscript, including: Allan Chinen, Arthur Hastings, George Leonard, Jack Travis, Marian Diamond, Stanley Krippner, John Kotre, and Jaak Panksepp. Thanks also to those individuals who gave encouragement and support after reading all or portions of the manuscript, including Howard Gardner, Jan Hunt, Barbara Findeisen, Sonny and Sheri Saruk, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Thomas Verny, Laura Huxley, Michael Murphy, Ralph Metzner, and Stanislav Grof. Thanks to several other people whose direct or indirect help or inspiration over the years was instrumental in making this book a reality, including: R. S. Issac Gardner, Andrew Sears, Lonnie Barbach, Lenore Lefer, Jack Kornfield, and Stephen and Linda Hann.

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Last, and most important, I’d like to thank my ex-wife, Barbara Turner, sandplay psychotherapist and fiber artist extraordinaire, who read and edited the manuscript, put up with me, supported me, helped me through times of stagnation and doubt, and ultimately inspired me to complete this book.

Introduction

STARTING YOUR INCREDIBLE ODYSSEY

So gladly from the songs of modem speech
Men turn, and see the stars, and feel the free
Shrill wind beyond the close of heavy flowers,
And through the music of the languid hours
They hear like Ocean on a western beach
The surge and thunder of the Odyssey.

—ANDREW LANG, "THE ODYSSEY"[1]

Of all the journeys that have taken place in the history of the world, real or imagined, few can match that of Odysseus in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey.* Here's a traveler who had more than his share of adventures. After fighting for ten years in Troy, he invented the Trojan horse, smuggled it into enemy territory, and helped to win the war for the Greeks. Then he spent another ten years trying to return home to Ithaca.

During his trip, he encountered lotus eaters whose flower food enchanted his shipmates. He did battle with a one-eyed giant whom he blinded with fire. Next, a group of cannibals destroyed his fleet of ships and a witch turned his shipmates into pigs. After that, he journeyed to Hades, where he received advice from a blind ghost about how to get back home. He lost more shipmates when a six-headed monster swooped down on them. A bolt of lightning shattered his last ship and he clung to the keel as the only survivor. After a long exile with a nymph named Calypso and a few more tempests and disasters, he returned home only to find his wife

besieged by suitors. After slaughtering them all, he settled down and finally got some rest. Quite a journey, indeed.

But that was nothing compared to what you've been through.

As a tiny multicelled organism you traveled down a treacherous canal called a fallopian tube and made your way to a large underground uterine cavern. Here you encountered killer bacteria, disturbing hormones, and maybe even a menacing bug-eyed birth control device designed to destroy you. As you grew, the cavern walls started to collapse around you and the only way out was through a small opening that almost crushed you. On the other side, giants in white coats pulled you out of the tunnel and sprayed stinging chemicals in your eyes. Then you were sent off to live in an alien land as a slave to other giants who alternately threatened and enchanted you. There, you had to explore strange new territory and face creatures your own size that knocked you down, pulled your hair, and spit up on you. After a time you were sent off to a strange hall where you were required to unscramble mysterious codes and pass many tests set for you by a goddess with a bachelor's degree in education. As you continued to grow, you fell under the enchantment of beautiful creatures, battled rivals, came perilously close to whirlpools created out of your own passions and desires, and endured the rites and rituals of the marketplace as you sought to find your place in the mysterious world around you.

Already, you've gone through far more than Odysseus ever did in his legendary life. And your journey isn't even finished! Ahead of you lie many more adventures: encounters with hydra-headed bosses, tempests and seductions with spouses or lovers, battles and truces with growing children, periods of exile and times of reunion with family and friends, struggles and triumphs with aging, and ultimately perhaps, passage through another tunnel into other incredible worlds in other dimensions. Whether you happen to be just setting out on your adult voyage of discovery, hitting midstream, or winding up a long journey and heading back to harbor, you are going through your own odyssey right now, a journey that is as unique as your thumbprint and yet as universal as the age-old stories of heroes and heroines from world mythology.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

I'd like you to think of this book as a kind of travelogue to your past, present, and future life. It seems incredible, but, apart from our sacred texts, our culture appears to lack any truly comprehensive road map to our own existence. The book critic Christopher Lehmann-Haupt once wrote: ". . . more than ever these days people seem to yearn for any extended form of narrative that might lend coherence to an existence that feels to them increasingly fragmentary."[2] I wrote this book because I wanted to provide readers with such a narrative; one that told the story of our journey through life in the broadest and most expansive way possible: from conception to death, or as a person at one of my lectures put it: "from sperm to worm." I realized that this was a monumental task that could never be fully achieved, given the innumerable uncertainties and complexities of life, and the tremendous variations in our own individual life histories. Nevertheless, I persisted, feeling that the contemporary narratives that already existed for telling the story of human development were incomplete. Erik Erikson's renowned "Eight Ages of Man" theory left out the most important parts of the story: the beginning and the end (birth and death). College textbooks on human development told the story in a pedantic and detached way. Most of the popular books that I'd read on the subject seemed to tell the story of our lives from a limited point of view (e.g., psychoanalytic, Jungian, Christian) or focused only on one stage of life (e.g., childhood, midlife, aging). It seemed to me that there needed to be a book about the life span that told as much of the story as possible.

Further, I wanted to write a book that responded to the increasing diversity of our population, and to the growing threat of rigid ideologies around the world, by describing our journey through life in a pluralistic and interdisciplinary way. Thus, I drew on a wide range of cultural, intellectual, philosophical, religious, and spiritual traditions. Having been fortunate in my education to study at schools that embraced an integral vision of human growth and transformation, I was inspired to tell the story of human development using material from anthropology, neuropsychology, evolutionary psychobiology, folklore, world literature, psychiatry, religion, physics, sociology, the arts, and a host of other fields. I passionately believe that in order to encompass the richness and complexity of our journey through life, we need to take advantage of as many tools at our disposal as possible.

In the course of this book, I will take you through each stage of life, chapter by chapter. Think of it as if you were settling into an ancient Greek sailing vessel at the beginning of the book, and then navigating your way through twelve different worlds as you read through the chapters. In fact, this is what I discovered: that each stage of life *is* a world unto itself, a veritable ecosystem with its own atmosphere, geography, fauna and flora, and other environmental features. I've also included an additional chapter on the possibilities of existence after physical death since most cultures from the beginning of recorded history have included this dimension as part of their stories about the journey of life.

Believing as I do that no stage of life is any better or worse than any other stage, I've described at the end of each chapter a special "gift" to humanity, which that particular stage of life provides. These twelve gifts include: potential, hope, vitality, playfulness, imagination, ingenuity, passion, enterprise, contemplation, benevolence, wisdom, and life. Near the end of each chapter, I've described the nature of each gift and made suggestions for how we can use that gift to make our lives richer and more meaningful regardless of our age or stage.

Each chapter also includes a practical section at the end, where you can engage in activities to connect your new understandings about that particular stage of life to your personal growth, the well-being of your family and friends, and the health of your community. You may find, for example, that the material in this book helps you think about and perhaps resolve issues from your childhood, or assists you in coping with difficulties in your current adult life, or prepares you to meet future challenges, including concerns about aging and death. In addition, you may discover that this book provides you with insights that will assist you in taking better care of your children or aging parents, or in better understanding the developmental needs of coworkers or close friends. Finally, you might wish to apply your knowledge gained from this book to the healing of the broader community. So many of the problems that plague our society are developmental ones, from unwanted pregnancies and child abuse to adolescent violence and age discrimination. These end-of-chapter activities provide a number of ways in which readers can get immediately involved in making a difference in the lives of others.

The three appendices at the end of the book include a filmography, a reading list, and a list of organizations. Each appendix is organized so that

the films, books, or organizations are categorized according to the stage of life that they most directly address. You may want to watch a movie or read a book on a specific stage of life with friends or loved ones, and then discuss the issues that come up regarding that stage. Or, after having been inspired by a particular stage of life, you might want to volunteer for, or contribute financially to, an organization that is fighting for the needs of individuals at that stage.

Finally, I've included a rather substantial notes section that includes source material for most of the quotations, research studies, and ideas in the book, as well as additional thoughts or material I couldn't bear to leave out. You'll have to forgive me, but I used to type dissertations to support myself in my early adulthood, and I really think that notes are amazingly cool. Moreover, they're the closest that a book can get to hyperlinks in today's high-tech world. Don't be intimidated by them. I put them in so that people who want to engage in further explorations will be able to do so. If this doesn't interest you, that's okay. Feel free to ignore them.

TRAVELING "UP FROM THE BODY" AND "DOWN FROM THE SPIRIT"

The major premise of this book is that there are two fundamental forces operating upon us as we journey through life: the biological and the spiritual. These influences are really two apparently distinct but intertwining developmental trajectories that interact to propel us through life. Their relationship represents the essential paradox of life itself: that each one of us is a material substance—a few pounds of clay, so to speak—enlivened by a mysterious nonmaterial entity that different traditions have referred to as soul, life force, mind, consciousness, essence, monad, or spirit. As French philosopher Blaise Pascal put it: ". . . man is to himself the greatest prodigy in nature, for he cannot conceive what body is, and still less what mind is, and least of all how a body can be joined to a mind. This is his supreme difficulty, and yet it is his very being."[3] How matter and spirit, or body and mind, came together to create living form is the great mystery of life.

World religions and mythologies have attempted to fathom this mystery by telling creation stories. Some stories declare that spirit created matter. Genesis 2:5, 7–8, for example, says: "When the Lord God made earth and

heaven, there was neither shrub nor plant growing wild upon the earth . . . Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus the man became living creature." Other creation stories portray spirit as emerging *out* of matter. Certain Native American cultures, for example, believe that all things material and spiritual first emerged from deep within the heart of the earth. There are also creation stories that indicate how matter and spirit came together as coequals to produce life. In ancient Egyptian mythology, for example, Seb (a male earth god) and Nut (a female sky goddess) were said to form all creation from their sexual union.[4]

Contemporary scientists, theologians, and philosophers periodically update these ancient versions of life's biggest riddle with theories of their own. Most scientists, for example, believe that the brain (matter) creates consciousness. Many mystics take the opposite view and believe that the brain is simply a material manifestation of consciousness. Still other thinkers see brain and mind as equal partners interacting to create reality.[5] Regardless of specific views concerning this mind-boggling topic, I find it useful in this book simply to regard matter and spirit as two seemingly separate but interconnected journeys. I'd like to take you through these two journeys of matter and spirit to illustrate just what I mean.

Your biological journey began with your appearance on life's stage as a zygote or one-celled organism: a mere speck of matter not too much different from a bit of mud or dust. From that point on, you became a blastocyst or multicelled organism, then an embryo, a fetus, and finally a newborn babe. As an infant, you were still very much a biological organism focused on the physical comforts and discomforts of eating, elimination, and clinging to your mother's body. Eventually, you grew *up from the body* into more complex forms of thinking, feeling, and behaving. All along, however, you maintained this thread of connection to your biological origins. As human potential writer Joseph Chilton Pearce explains: "Throughout our lives, the earth remains the matrix of all matrices. No matter how abstract our explorations of pure thought and created reality, the mind draws its energy from the brain, which draws its energy from the body matrix, which draws its energy from the earth matrix."[6]

This biological line of human development is best symbolized by the umbilical cord. This cord is what linked you not only to your own mother but to her mother, and her mother's mother, and so forth all the way back to

the beginnings of biological life. James Joyce expressed this connection lyrically when he wrote in his great novel *Ulysses*, which was a modern updating of Homer's *The Odyssey*: "The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh . . ."[7] In *body up* development, we trace the growth of our "root system" back through millions of years of evolution and genetics and experience ourselves ultimately as linked with the earliest forms of life, and even further back, as Joseph Chilton Pearce indicated above, to the very body of mother earth herself.

There is another journey you take, however, that has quite different origins from that of the earth. This is a hidden journey that only the poets and mystics seem to know much about. It represents the part of you that came *down from the spirit,* that descended from a higher or broader realm of being into a lower or narrower state of material existence. William Wordsworth referred to this *spirit down* journey in his poem "Ode: On Intimations of Immortality in Childhood" when he wrote: "Not in entire forgetfulness / And not in utter nakedness / But trailing clouds of Glory do we come / From God, who is our home: Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"[8] William Blake spoke of *spirit down* development when he observed: ". . . the source of life descends to be a weeping babe."[9] Religious traditions refer to the *spirit down* journey when they speak of the fall from grace, the exile from Paradise, the incarnation of the soul into the body, or the imprisonment of spirit in matter.

The key image for *spirit down* development is the angel, a celestial being that linked you as an unborn or newborn child to a higher power. Many world cultures have given a name to this perinatal being. Christianity refers to this power as a Guardian Angel; Judaism calls this angel Lailah; Buddhism calls her Avalokiteshwara, Kwan Yin, or Kannon; and Maori tradition refers to her as Hine-Titama. In the next chapter, we will discuss this imagery in detail. This spiritual guardian helps us on our journey. While we may forget our spiritual origins as we grow *up from the body,* this guardian periodically reminds us of our life's purpose. *Spirit down* development also manifests unexpectedly during our lives in such moments as poetic inspiration, archetypal dreams, peak experiences, mystical visions, or aesthetic awakenings, experiences that are particularly likely to emerge at transitional periods in our lives such as early childhood, adolescence, midlife, or old age.

The *body up* journey is the story told in just about all of the college textbooks and most of the popular books on human development available in bookstores. There is scant reference to *spirit down* development in any of these books. This is unfortunate since most cultures from the beginning of recorded history have included the spiritual journey as an integral part of their story, and still today, the spiritual life is a central focus of the majority of people's experience around the world. In my estimation, leaving the essence or soul out of the stages of life is like studying birds in the forest without considering their song or their flight.

Two Modes of Being: Adapting and Remembering

The process of coming *up from the body* is a story of *adaptation.* Along this line of development we evolved in true Darwinian fashion, struggling to survive in the jungles of life while striving to fit our own uniqueness into the game plan of the world around us. *Adaptation* looks to the past only for clues as to how to face the present and the future. *Adaptation* is about mastering the tools and skills necessary to survive and thrive in the existing social order. The thread of *adaptation* runs through such fields as politics, business, economics, science, and technology. All stage theories of human development—including those of Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, and Erik Erikson—are mainly stories about *adaptation*.[10] Each of these models describes how human beings grow *up from the body* in a series of graduated steps, becoming more facile over time in adapting to the surrounding environment. These theories, however, have little to say about *spirit down* development.

The story of coming *down from the spirit* is about *remembering.* It involves paying attention to who we are in our essence as nonmaterial beings. The process of *remembering* encompasses all those aspects of life that look back to our spiritual origins as individuals or as cultural groups. It includes explorations in folklore, mythology, consciousness studies, transpersonal psychology, anthropology, and also in religion, whose Latin root, *religare*, means literally "to link back." The arts are also an important part of *remembering.* After all, it was Mnemosyne or Memory who was the mother of the nine muses in Greek mythology, encompassing poetry, music, history, dance, comedy, and drama.

Everyone has some combination of the *adapter* and the *rememberer* in them. The *adapter* in us aims to acquire skills that teach about how the world works, and seeks to develop competence in order to move up the ladder of success and face the challenges of the future. The *rememberer* in us reads poetry, views art that stirs the soul, grapples with philosophical questions, and struggles in therapy to recover a lost self. These two activities—*adapting* and *remembering*—seem to have been at the heart of human activity since the beginning of recorded time. For thousands of years societies engaged in *adaptive* tasks—hunting, gathering, building shelters, and crafting tools—to ensure their physical survival. But they also devoted a great deal of attention to activities designed to help them *remember* who they were as people, by engaging in dance, play, song, storytelling, religious rituals, and other "nonadaptive" activities.

While everybody possesses a mixture of the *adapter* and the *rememberer,* many people show more of one quality than of the other. Full-fledged *adapters* tend to be practical and sensible—sometimes even ruthless—in learning the game of life and leaving the competition behind. Classic examples of *adapters* include Napoleon, Margaret Thatcher, and Bill Gates. *Rememberers*, on the other hand, tend to be sensitive and aesthetic as they regard the depths of their own souls and those of others. Famous examples include Saint Francis, Marcel Proust, and Virginia Woolf. Our modern technological culture tends to honor the *adapters* more than the *rememberers.* After all, the superadapter CEOs of society make far more money than the rememberer poets. In other cultures, however, it's the *rememberers*—the shamans, healers, artists, storytellers, and mystics—who receive far more prestige and support from the community than the business and political leaders.

To illustrate some of the key differences between *adapters* and *rememberers*, I'd like to share the stories of two Americans who lived through the middle part of the nineteenth century: railroad magnate Leland Stanford and poet Emily Dickinson. Both were associated with important centers of learning in the United States. Stanford founded the university that bears his name. Dickinson's grandfather was the founder of Amherst College. But each had a radically different life course that distinctly marked them as *adapter* and *rememberer* respectively.

Leland Stanford studied law in New York and had a successful legal practice in Wisconsin until a fire wiped him out financially in 1852 at the

age of twenty-eight. He responded to this crisis by joining his brothers in the California Gold Rush. After mining gold for a while, he began to assist them in selling merchandise to miners. He also served as a justice of the peace, and helped to organize what later became the Sacramento Public Library. Eventually he bought out the Stanford Brothers store, amassed some wealth, and became active in politics. In 1861 he was elected governor of California (he would later be a U.S. Senator). In the 1860s he joined a group of wealthy financiers to create the Central Pacific Railroad. In 1869 he drove in the stake that completed the transcontinental railroad. Stanford built a mansion on what later became known as Nob Hill in San Francisco, developed a horse breeding business that set nineteen world records, and owned two wineries, one with the largest vineyard in the world.

While traveling in Europe in 1884, Stanford's son, Leland Jr., contracted typhoid fever and died two months before his sixteenth birthday. Stanford fell into a troubled sleep the day the boy died, and when he awoke he turned to his wife and said: "The children of California shall be our children." Stanford put $20 million of his fortune ($400 million in 2007 dollars) into a new learning center on the site of his horse farm. This is how Stanford University (still affectionately referred to as "the farm") was born.

Stanford's life embodied the role of a true *adapter.* After financial ruin early in his career, instead of collapsing in despair he adapted by seeking his fortune in the California Gold Rush. When he saw that he would make no money mining gold, he joined his brothers in selling provisions to miners and became successful. He made his fortune and got involved in politics, the happy hunting ground of true *adapters.* He literally joined the country together with a golden stake in Promontory, Utah, by completing the transcontinental railway—a move that would help millions of people start new lives on the West Coast. In the horse breeding business, he developed his own theories of blood lines and training, and triumphed there too. At the peak of his power, his son died unexpectedly, and he adapted to this tragedy by channeling his grief into the development of a world-class center of learning that would help the sons and daughters of others prosper and flourish. Leland Stanford was a man of action who worked hard, consolidated his financial and political power, and met adversity with courage and determination.[11]

Emily Dickinson, on the other hand, was quite a different sort of person. After attending college for one year at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College), she became homesick and returned to her childhood home in Amherst, where she lived for the rest of her life. Although she had a few strong intellectual relationships in her life, she was basically a loner who rarely left the house. She read a great deal, corresponded with many people, and wrote poems. Despite having written 1,775 poems in the course of her fifty-six years, many among the greatest in American literature, her brilliance never received public recognition while she was alive. Only eleven of her poems were even published during her lifetime. A true nonconformist, she renounced her Puritan Christian upbringing when she was twenty years old, and worked out her unique spiritual beliefs and disbeliefs through her iridescent poetry. Not content with standard writing methods, she punctuated her poems with dashlike marks of various sizes and directions (some are even vertical), capitalized words in the middle of sentences, and often used unconventional syntax. Her poems dealt with themes of love, death, time, nature, loneliness, ecstasy, religion, and the spirit.

Emily Dickinson showed few traits of the *adapter.* She didn't set out to conquer the world like Leland Stanford did. When she encountered difficulty in life, she retreated to her family home. Even in her most important work—her poetry—she didn't seek to become famous. Her poems, with their strange punctuation, looked nothing like what was being published at the time. To most people, she was a reclusive eccentric.

It was as a *rememberer*, however, that Emily Dickinson excelled beyond measure. The delicate fabric of the inner life was what transported her. A friend of Dickinson's wrote: "[Emily] once asked me, if it did not make me shiver to hear a great many people talk, [she said] they took all the clothes off their souls—and we discussed this matter."[12] It is interesting that after her father died, she wore only white for the rest of her life. Her poems quiver with a sensitivity to the deepest topics of existence, especially death. Her most famous poem begins: "Because I could not stop for Death / He kindly stopped for me / The Carriage held but just Ourselves / And Immortality."[13]

Although she renounced formal religion early in life, her poems continually tested her own personal faith. One poem declares: "I know that He exists. Somewhere—in Silence—He has hid his rare life / From our

gross eyes."[14] While those around her went on with their ambitious *adapter* lives, Dickinson inhabited a hidden world woven of deep inner feeling, spiritual struggle, and an extraordinary receptivity to nature and to the inner lives of those around her. She spent a lifetime trying to *remember* the essence of what it means to exist. While she did not go out into the world and make the kind of impact that Leland Stanford did, in her own way she lived an inner life that was as rich and powerful as his outer life, and ultimately, perhaps even more influential.

Although you may not see yourself reflected in the life of either Leland Stanford or Emily Dickinson, their stories serve as two poles of the *adapter-rememberer* continuum. From them you can begin to understand where you might fit in between these two extremes. As you read through the chapters of this book, you'll probably get a better sense of whether you're more of an *adapter* or a *rememberer.* If you lean toward the *adapter* side of the spectrum you'll probably be more interested in the chapters of this book that relate to your present and future stages of life, so that you can figure out ways of meeting the challenges that lie ahead. On the other hand, if you see yourself better reflected in the *rememberer,* you'll more likely be drawn to the first half of this book (and the chapters on death and the afterlife), where you can explore your past stages and recover yourself in the earliest moments of life.

The truth is that you need to have the qualities of both the *adapter* and the *rememberer* in order to be fully human. A person who focuses too much time on *adapting* to whatever the present and the future may hold squanders away her energies on an endless pursuit of material gain and societal approval and loses sight of the richer dimensions of life. On the other hand, an individual who spends too much time *remembering* the deeper dimensions of life finds it hard to keep appointments, loses his car keys, and has an all-around difficult time fitting in with the world around him. Too much adapting and you might become obsessive-compulsive. Too much remembering and you could become schizophrenic. In either case, you're out of balance.

Homer's *The Odyssey* suggests a way out of this dilemma. At one point in his journey, Odysseus had to sail his boat past the island of the Sirens. These sylphs were known to sing a song so enchanting that anyone who heard it wanted to remain on the island forever. The Sirens' beaches were strewn with the skeletons of sailors who'd listened to the melody and died

for it. Odysseus had heard of this legendary song and how beautiful it was, and he longed to hear it. This was the *rememberer* side of his personality speaking. But the *adapter* in him wanted to get the boat safely home to Ithaca. So, with the advice of Circe, the daughter of the sun, he worked out a compromise. He gave his crew members wax to put in their ears so they wouldn't hear the enchanting song and could thus focus all their energies on the adaptive task of sailing the boat back to Ithaca. Odysseus elected not to put the wax in his ears so he could hear the song, thus satisfying the *rememberer* side of his personality. But he also instructed his men to lash him to the mast so that he could direct them home to Ithaca without yielding to the Sirens' enchantment, thereby placating his *adapter* self.[15] In this way, he heard the enchanting music and still managed to get back home. This is what it means to be fully human: to find the balance between the demands of outer necessity and the call of the inner life; between what is yet to come and what has passed. The journey of life draws us onward to Ithaca, but it also invites us to take in all the rich scenery along the way. My hope is that after reading this book, you will feel a deepened appreciation for the miracle of life, and will be able to look at your own journey, as well as the journeys of those around you, with a renewed sense of compassion and wonder.

May you each have amazing stories to tell and powerful insights to gain as you journey through the twelve stages of your own personal Human Odyssey!

CHAPTER 1

Prebirth

THE UNDISCOVERED CONTINENT

Show me your original face before your parents were born.

—ZEN KOAN

There's a beautiful legend from the Jewish tradition about our life before birth. In this tale, the fetus in the womb has a light that shines above his head that sees from one end of the universe to the other. This light encompasses the unborn's own deep past and his ultimate destiny. Just before birth, however, the angel Lailah comes up to the unborn babe and lightly strikes her finger on his upper lip. This act extinguishes the light and causes the child to take birth in total forgetfulness of all he has known during his prebirth existence. The purpose of life is to recover this light. It's said that this is why we bear a little crease in our upper lip called the philtrum: This is the mark of the angel.[1] It's also said that this is why, when we suddenly recall a forgotten name or a misplaced object, we instinctively touch a finger to our upper lip and exclaim, "Ah yes, now I remember!" We've made contact with our angel of destiny once more.

This story hints at how our prenatal lives may not have been as unconscious as modern science suggests. Instead of a *body up* progression of purely biological steps leading to birth, prebirth might as well have been a whole universe of conscious experiences, now forgotten, but still perhaps alive at some deep level of our being. As the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge once wrote: "The history of man for nine months preceding his birth would, probably, be far more interesting and contain events of greater moment, than all the three score and ten years that follow it."[2]

THE COUNTDOWN TO CONCEPTION

The excitement all begins with conception. This is a kind of lunar docking operation that requires the precise coordination in time and space of two vehicles. The first vehicle is an ovum traveling down the fallopian tube and available for fertilization only for about a twenty-four-hour period. The second vehicle is one among hundreds of millions of sperm cells racing at a speed of three inches per hour toward this ovoid destination.

Imagine the entire population of the United States, Russia, and Japan leaving the starting block at the same time on a megamarathon sprint proportionately longer than a trip to the moon. In this contest only one robust runner makes it all the way to the finish line. You begin to get a picture of the challenges facing a sperm on his way to a link-up with his egg "cellmate." *Brave New World* author Aldous Huxley once expressed this event biblically when he wrote: "A million million spermatozoa / All of them alive / Out of their cataclysm but one poor Noah / Dare hope to survive."[3] Research suggests that the sperm may actually "sniff" its way to the egg.[4] That one lucky sperm succeeds essentially by using his lashing tail to outdrill the last couple of hundred survivors clamoring to break through the ovum wall. Once the victor gains entry, the ovum initiates chemical changes that essentially close the castle gates to any other competitor.

Then begins the single greatest event of all biological existence. The nucleus of the sperm cell travels deep into the ovum and fuses with the egg nucleus, mixing his rich genetic material with hers and bringing an entirely new life-form into being; a fertilized one-celled organism or zygote, the first "you."

It's amazing to think that each human body walking around on the planet today was only a little while ago a single cell buzzing around in a liquid environment. The bodies of the president of the United States, the Pope, the chairman of General Motors, your mother-in-law: They were all zygotes. And so were you. Look in a mirror at your adult self. As you do this, think about being a zygote just a few decades ago. You might even get a little bit dizzy trying to comprehend the mystery of it all.

Of course, this is only half of the story, the beginnings of the *body up* journey. There is also a *spirit down* side to this great mystery of creation. In fact, there may be more life in and around that little zygote than seems at first apparent from a purely physiological point of view. The medieval

Christians referred to the male sperm as *numen* and viewed conception as a *numinous* process (a Latin word meaning “filled with divinity”). A twelfth-century miniature by Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen shows this perspective graphically by depicting the descent of the soul directly into the fetus of the mother.[5] In many African creation myths, the first people are lowered to earth from the sky. Chinese Buddhist philosophy believes that the life force comes from the air above, down to and into the earth force of the fetus.

Perhaps the most remarkable map of prebirth as a *spirit down* journey is found in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (or *Bardo Thodöl*), an eighth-century Buddhist guide for helping departed souls achieve liberation from the wheel of rebirth.[6] Tibetan Buddhists believe that beings continually reincarnate until they come to realize the illusory nature of existence. Unfortunately, the “winds of karma” (a person’s desires and past actions) usually push them back into rebirth. And so the last portion of the *Bardo Thodöl* contains explicit instructions on the art of choosing a womb site in which to be reborn. The text explains how the traveling soul will begin to see pairs of copulating couples. It counsels that the soul will start to feel attracted to the opposite-sex parent and angry toward the same-sex parent. The *Bardo Thodöl* thus anticipated the Oedipal complex a thousand years before Freud and suggested that it begins in the womb. Ultimately, the soul takes birth with parents who will provide the karmic lessons necessary for eventual liberation.

These crosscultural spiritual perspectives as noted above are mirrored in contemporary clinical accounts of individuals remembering their prenatal existence. In one account of a session of hypnotic regression, a patient reported: “I am a sphere, a ball, a balloon, I am hollow, I have no arms, no legs, no teeth, I don’t feel myself to have a front or back, up or down. I float, I fly, I spin. Sensations come from everywhere. It is as though I am a spherical eye.”[7] Canadian psychiatrist Thomas Verny comments, “I have heard dozens of similar accounts from my own and other psychiatrists’ patients and, more to the point, I have found that if you examine them closely, these recollections often correspond to events in the early stages of pregnancy.”[8]

In her book *The Child of Your Dreams*, author Laura Huxley, Aldous Huxley’s wife, compared the moment of conception to the big bang theory of the universe: “Another explosion much closer in time and space to you

was just as momentous: it took place when a sperm and an egg came together and created you. This event is usually not described in such terms in the average biology textbook. However, when regressed to the moment of their own conception, a number of individuals report this experience as a joyous burst of the exultant fireworks of life."[9]

TTHE GTREAT RTIVER JTOURNEY

After fertilization, you began the voyage down the remaining portion of the six-inch-long fallopian tube, headed toward implantation in the uterus, a journey that took about three days. This was probably the most treacherous journey that you've ever taken. You were lucky to have survived it at all. Only 50 percent of fertilized eggs make it all the way down the tube to implantation in the uterus. You could have died right after conception due to genetic defects. You might have been killed by white blood cells that mistook you for an intruder as you traveled down the fallopian tube (the equivalent, perhaps, of the one-eyed monster that tried to kill Odysseus on his journey back to Ithaca). You could have become entrapped among the various scars and adhesions in the fallopian tube left over from wear and tear to your mother's body tissues. But with time, you grew bigger and stronger.

About twenty-four hours after conception you began to divide into a multicelled clump called a *morula* (Latin for "mulberry"). Then, over the next three days, you grew in size to about one hundred cells and became a *blastocyst* (Greek for "sprouting pouch"). As you finished your trip through the fallopian tube, you had your first experience of "birth," not into the world of human beings, but into the world of your mother's own uterus. You actually had to squeeze through the last part of the fallopian tube at its narrowest point, and your mother helped you by going through mini-contractions of the fallopian tube. You could have gotten stuck right there in the tube and miscarried as an *ectopic* (Greek for "out of place") pregnancy. However, you made it!

Once inside the uterus you faced a whole new set of challenges. First, you had to break free of your *zona pellucida* (Latin for "transparent girdle"), a kind of suit of armor that protected you during your dangerous journey down the fallopian tube. Then, like a Greek sailing vessel, you had to search for a suitable landing site on the surface of your mother's uterus.

For several days you floated along in the uterus until you found a soft, thick, warm surface that appeared hospitable, and expanding in mass, you attached yourself to this uterine lining or *endometrium* (Greek for "within the womb"). You were lucky to find such a site. If your mother had developed endometriosis or experienced other problems with the lining of her uterus, your attempts to attach to the uterine lining might have been like trying to land your boat on a rugged and rocky seacoast.

There were other dangers as well. The endometrium might have attempted to reject you as a foreign substance by flushing you out of the womb, or birth control measures might have thwarted your attempts to gain a foothold. However, nature provided just what you needed to survive. Your mother secreted chemicals to shut down the processes of rejection, and you found yourself set up in a brand-new home with a nine-month lease.

While you probably don't remember this incredibly dangerous journey, many cultures seem to have recorded the details of this trip in their heroic myths. There is a whole class of myths that reflect what mythologist Joseph Campbell in his book *The Mythic Image* termed "the infant exile motif": stories about the births of heroes who were threatened with death by evil authorities, hidden in a container by an ally, and sent up a body of water, only to be retrieved and nurtured by animals or people.[10] These stories narrate the origins of such legendary figures as Hercules, Krishna, and Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, who were raised by wolves. They might at some archetypal level also be telling the story of the journey of the human zygote on its way to implantation in the uterus.

The first tale of this kind in world mythology is from Babylonia around five thousand years ago and describes the birth of its founder, Sargon. As legend has it, after Sargon's mother gave birth to him in a hidden place, she put him into a vessel made of reeds, closed the opening with pitch, and dropped him into the Euphrates River. He floated down the river until Akki, a water carrier, discovered Sargon and raised him as his adopted son. Later Sargon would rule the kingdom of Akkad for fifty-five years.

Similarly, in the Bible, Moses was sent down a river in a basket of bulrushes as an infant. The pharaoh of Egypt had ordered all his people to throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile. A Levite woman, however, hid her infant to avoid the pharaoh's plot. Exodus 2:3–4 reports: ". . . she got a rush basket for him, made it watertight with clay and tar, laid him in it, and put it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile." He was discovered

by the pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him and raised him as her own in the royal household. Eventually, Moses escaped and led his people out of Egypt into the Promised Land.

R. D. Laing suggested that these scenarios parallel the uterine journey in many startling respects. The heroic leader is the zygote placed in a boat (zona pellucida), which floats down a river (the fallopian tube), lands on a shore (the endometrium), receives the care of people or animals (the nurturing forces of the mother's uterus), and grows into maturity (development of the fetus to full term). Laing saw these prenatal elements not only in mythology, but also in the dreams and struggles of his patients. One thirty-six-year-old businessman, for example, wrote: "I feel I'm hanging on to a cliff with my fingernails . . . if I let go, I'll float off down the river . . . I'll be washed away . . . I shall be completely mad."[11] Laing pointed out that many of life's deepest fears and most existential conflicts might be traced back to these earliest days of prenatal existence. Like Odysseus, each one of us encountered great dangers on the waters in our prenatal sailing craft.

BECOMING A FETUS

Eight days after conception you were an embryo consisting of thousands of new stem cells governed by a genetic process that began assigning roles and job sites to areas that soon became your nervous system, digestive system, and other major physiological functions and anatomical structures. These embryonic stem cells were of the same type that are now being used in scientific research to generate specialized tissues for treating a wide range of diseases.[12] Over the next few weeks you went through more transformations than a contortionist in a traveling circus. Just fourteen days after implantation you looked a little like a plump frankfurter split at both ends. Between weeks three and four, the split ends of the wiener closed to form a shrimplike brain and spine: the beginnings of your nervous system. Between weeks four and five, your eyes, nose, and mouth began to emerge, your spine curled around like a dragon's tail, and you resembled a strange prehistoric creature. In the nineteenth century it was believed that during these first few weeks of life, the human organism recapitulated all the stages of evolution from sea life to amphibian to mammal.[13] This isn't exactly what occurred. You didn't actually *become* a shrimp, a lizard, or a

minuscule *Jurassic Park* monster. But, you did share some of the same genetic codes as primitive vertebrates, which in these early embryonic stages made you resemble them to some degree. By week six you looked like an alien from another planet, with a large head and beady eyes. In another couple of weeks the formation of your organs was complete and you had pretty much every physical structure found in a full-sized adult. At this point in your journey you became officially known as *a fetus* (Latin for "bringing forth"). Your *spirit down* soul may have been witnessing all these physical changes going on from its celestial realm, but it's around this time that the initial twinkling of a rudimentary *body up* consciousness may have begun. Your first neural reflexes occurred at eight weeks, when fetuses have been observed to withdraw their hands in response to stimulation of the lip region.[14]

During the next few months of intrauterine life you were like a scuba diver rolling around in a warm and comfy cushion of amniotic fluid at a temperature of about 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit. You were enveloped in water. It's interesting to note that many of humanity's creation myths begin in water. Genesis 1:1–2 says: "In the beginning of Creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters." In the Babylonian creation epic, Apsu (a freshwater god) and Tiamat (a saltwater god) represent the primeval waters at the beginning of time. Even the first Western philosopher, the Greek thinker Thales, suggested that the world originated from water, believing that the earth actually floated on the liquid stuff. Collective creation myths such as those found in the Bible and in other sacred and philosophical texts worldwide give us possibly the earliest chronicles of the actual collective memories of intrauterine existence as earthly *body up* awareness and celestial *spirit down* consciousness come together in a unified way.

Traditions differ in their accounts of when the spirit or soul actually enters the fetus. Buddhism generally regards *conception* as the time when the soul incarnates into matter. Judaism views the fetus as a "partial life" and only *at birth* is there a full human being. Aristotle wrote that the human fetus was animated or "ensouled" forty days after conception for males, and ninety days after conception for females. Some early Christian theologians regarded quickening (that time around the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy when the mother feels the life moving inside of her) as the

central moment of the soul's entry into the fetus.[15] In Dante's *Divine Comedy* there is an account of the spiritualization of the fetus given by the deceased Roman poet Statius to Dante and Virgil as they travel through Purgatory. Statius says, "Know soon as in the embryo, to the brain, / Articulation is complete, then turns / The primal Mover with a smile of joy / On such great work of nature, and imbreathes / New spirit replete with virtue, that what here / Active it finds, to its own substance draws, / And forms an individual soul, that lives, / And feels, and bends reflective on itself."[16] Here one may also think of the words in Genesis 1:3–4: "Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good." From the time of quickening, the light of consciousness shines more brightly from within the womb. Even a purely *body up* perspective bears this out. Science tells us that myelin deposits, those substances that provide insulation to the nervous system's wiring and conduct nerve impulses, appear as early as the fourth month of pregnancy and that brain life as we know it may begin around the 28th week of pregnancy.[17]

Once your eyes opened during the seventh month of pregnancy, what images there were for you to see! Growing out of your belly was an enormous twisting vine—an umbilical cord—coiling upward into the branching treelike structure known as the *placenta* (Latin for "flat cake"), where you received all your nourishment from your mother. Perhaps here is where you encountered the archetypal Tree of Life that so many cultures have woven into the fabric of their mythic dreams: the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the Nordic tree of Yggdrasil, the sacred Hebrew pole called Asherah, or the Celtic sacred wood.[18] In some cultures, the umbilical and placental discharge after birth is saved, dried, and planted in the earth under a tree. These trees are thought to protect children and sometimes are referred to as the guardian angel of the child. Cinderella was actually saved by a magic tree and a few birds in the Grimm brothers' tale, not by a fairy godmother.[19]

HEAVEN AND HELL BEFORE BIRTH

On a physical level, you engaged in an intricate biological dance with your mother through the Tree of Life/placenta, which acted as a kind of referee or choreographer to keep the two of you in a biochemical balance. Though your mother's blood system was separate from yours, she still passed many

hormones and chemical signals through the placenta to nourish you. And you also had a part to play as you interacted with these signals through your own chemical responses to keep your mother's immune system from rejecting you.

Being physically a part of your mother, you were involved in every action of her life. You were there when she had sex, got angry, cried, fought with your father, laughed, vomited, listened to music, and at every other moment besides. And she passed on her subjective moods not just through the physical experiences of jostling, bumping, singing, or rocking you, but through her hormonal responses to the positive or negative emotions in her own life. These hormones essentially set the thermostat on your "emotional climate control" and created intrauterine versions of sunny days and tropical breezes, or thunderstorms and hurricanes. I'd like you to consider the following "best-case" and "worst-case" scenarios of prenatal experiences.

A Best-Case Scenario: The Good Womb. Like aboriginal mothers in Australia, your mother began bonding with you even before conception by having dreams about you, and drawing images of those dreams. Once you were conceived, like Mbuti mothers in the Congo, she took you to a special place in nature, sang soothing lullabies to express her joy, talked with you about the world that you were about to enter, and gave assurances that life on earth was safe and full of blessings.[20] She ate a nutritious diet and avoided drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. She also stayed away from any foods that might have had an adverse effect and received regular checkups to monitor the course of her pregnancy.[21] She enjoyed a loving relationship with your father, who was almost as involved in the pregnancy as she was, rubbing her belly, singing to you, and engaging in lots of hugging and love-making. She meditated and prayed, read stimulating literature, and engaged in her own highly creative life and professional study. She lived with you in a peaceful rural town that included both sides of your extended family, which provided a nurturing support system for the both of you.

A Worst-Case Scenario: The Bad Womb. Your mother was what some prenatal psychologists call a "catastrophic mother." She was a teenage dropout when she had you. She didn't expect to have you and she didn't want you when she realized you were there. She tried aborting you with different folk remedies and flooded you with "rejection" hormones. She

smoked, drank, and used recreational drugs. She didn't eat regular meals but snacked erratically on fast food and candy. She was suffering from several different diseases when she carried you, including tuberculosis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia. She had a partner, not committed to the relationship, who physically beat her (you felt the punches), periodically left her (you felt the abandonment hormones), and screamed a lot (you felt the stress hormones). While she carried you, her own mother had a nervous breakdown, a war broke out in her native country, and her brother committed suicide.[22]

These scenarios represent two ends of a spectrum of womb experiences that could have made the difference between your being in heaven experiencing the bliss of angels or in hell undergoing the torments of demons. Leonardo da Vinci, who saw so much of the beauty and ugliness of life, recognized the importance of the pregnant mother's state almost five hundred years ago when he wrote: "And [the soul of the child] at first lies dormant and under the tutelage of the soul of the mother, who nourishes and vivifies it by the umbilical vein, with all its spiritual parts, and this happens because this umbilicus is joined to the placenta and the cotyledons, by which the child is attached to the mother. And these are the reason why a wish, a strong craving or a fright or any other mental suffering in the mother, has more influence on the child than on the mother; for there are many cases when the child loses its life from them. . . ."[23]

The surrealist painter Salvador Dalí claimed to remember his own intrauterine existence and wrote that it was hellish. Three years before Dalí was born, his parents had lost a son to meningitis. According to Dalí, they never recovered from it, and the anguish over the loss felt by his mother while pregnant with Salvador was transferred directly to the unborn artist-to-be. He wrote: "My fetus swam in an infernal placenta. . . . I have only to close my eyes, pressing on them with my two fists, to see again the colors of that intrauterine purgatory, the tints of Luciferian fire, red, orange, blue-glinting yellow; a goo of sperm and phosphorescent egg white in which I am suspended like an angel fallen from grace."[24]

Scientific studies now verify what Leonardo da Vinci and Salvador Dalí observed. We know, for example, that mothers who would have liked to abort the fetus but were prevented from doing so by legal restrictions have children with higher levels of delinquency, emotional disturbance, and physical illness than mothers who actively want their kids.[25] Mothers who

are depressed during their pregnancies give birth to infants who are hard to console when upset, and mothers who are anxious have more cranky and colicky babies. According to one study, a woman trapped in a stormy marriage has a 236 percent greater chance of bearing a psychologically or physically damaged child than a woman in a safe and supportive relationship. Babies born during wartime—when a mother is worried about the well-being of her soldier husband—tend to also have more physical or emotional difficulties. Mothers who drink, smoke, or use drugs give birth to kids with more physical problems. In one study of pregnant mothers who smoked, fetal heart rates increased rapidly whenever the women even *thought* of having a cigarette.[26]

While mothers provide the all-important social, emotional, and physical nourishment for a positive prenatal experience, they also can create a spiritual climate of well-being that might compensate for whatever damage could be going on at the physical or emotional level. Along with the Jewish story of the angel Lailah that began this chapter, many cultures have mythic images of a protective spirit or guardian angel during pregnancy, which may be an archetypal representation of the mother's own spiritually nurturing influence. One of my favorite images is by a nineteenth-century Japanese artist showing the bodhisattva Kannon with an unborn child. In this image, Kannon is pouring the sweet dew of compassionate wisdom on to the smiling fetus, whose umbilical cord trails downward into the earthly realms below.[27] This image shows in a striking way how the fetus exists midway between the heavenly domain of the devas and angels above and the realms of biological development below described so well by modern science.

In Greek mythic tradition, this guardian spirit is represented by the *daemon* (Greek for "divinity").[28] Plato's classic book on education, *The Republic*, actually concludes with a description of how each soul about to be reborn chooses a daemon to serve as a guardian for the life it is about to embark on. The daemon leads the soul to the river of Lethe in the underworld, where it drinks from the waters of forgetfulness.[29] Just like the baby in the Jewish legend, the soul then takes birth without a memory of its origins. A similar deity existed in Roman mythology and was called a *genius* (Latin for "to beget"). The genius functioned much like the Christian guardian angel, helping the individual out of difficulties during his lifetime and inspiring him in moments of need. In that sense, it functioned much like

the goddess Athena in Homer's *The Odyssey*, who helped Odysseus (and his son, Telemachus) out of one disaster after another. These nurturing images may be, from a *body up* perspective, the positive hormones secreted by a mother in utero, but from a *spirit down* point of view they represent aspects of the spiritual universe that cradle the growing fetus.[30]

THE WATERS OF FORGETFULNESS

As you entered the last weeks before birth, from a strictly physical perspective life inside the womb started to become a real squeeze. You were swallowing huge amounts of amniotic fluid comparable to a 120-pound adult drinking five gallons of Gatorade every day. You were developing enough independent skills to be able to live outside of the womb if you decided to make an early appearance. You also were spending time dreaming, since research shows that a fetus experiences the same kind of rapid eye movements (REMs) as children and adults do when they dream. Prenatal researcher Thomas Verny suggests that you may have even been able to tune into the thoughts or dreams of your mother so that her dreams became yours; possibly a precursor of extrasensory perception. Neurologist Dominick Purpura of the Albert Einstein Medical College in New York City speculates that "true brain life" (in the *body up* sense) begins in the weeks just before birth when the fetal brain actually has more nerve connections than the adult brain.[31]

Spirit down development, however, may bring in quite another dimension of consciousness during the time just before birth. Psychologist Helen Wambach analyzed 750 cases of individuals who remembered life before birth under hypnosis. Eighty-one percent of the subjects said that they remembered choosing to be born, and many of these reported having "counselors" available to them to help them make that decision. This serves as another echo of the presence of the spirit guardians described in this chapter.[32]

Given all of the incredible adventures that occur during prenatal existence, you may be wondering why you don't remember anything about this time of life. There may be a good biological explanation for this. What keeps most of us from remembering our prebirth experiences could be a set of chemical changes that occur just before birth. In the hours before birth, your mother (and possibly you as well) secreted a pituitary hormone called

oxytocin (Greek for “quick birth”) that stimulated contractions in your mother’s uterus and started the delivery process. Doctors sometimes use a synthetic version of this hormone, called Pitocin, to induce or speed up labor. Oxytocin has a number of other important functions at birth including stopping postbirth bleeding and starting milk production in the mother’s breasts. Controlled studies of oxytocin administration to healthy human subjects have documented its amnesic properties.[33] It causes people to forget things. Oxytocin, then, may be the biological equivalent of Lethe, the underworld river of Greek mythology that caused all who drank of its waters to forget their former lives. It could be the chemical correlate of the angel Lailah coming up to the fetus and striking its upper lip.

Perhaps those who receive an adequate supply of oxytocin at birth quickly forget their prebirth experiences, the better to attend to the demands of the life ahead. These individuals may grow up to become the *adapters* of society, content to let the past go and happy to move ahead into the challenges of the present and the future. Research indicates that early exposure to greater levels of oxytocin may be related to higher levels of interpersonal ability in later life, suggesting an improved ability to *adapt* to the social world.[34] On the other hand, it’s also possible that those who didn’t receive as large a dose of oxytocin at birth—those whom the angel of destiny didn’t touch—grow up to become the *rememberers* of society. They are the children and adults who can’t stop thinking about where they came from, and can’t get it out of their minds that there is something deeper in them and in life that demands recognition.[35] This prenatal self may still be calling to them, echoing the sentiments of the American poet Walt Whitman who wrote: “Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me / My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it / For it the nebula cohered to an orb / The long slow strata piled to rest it on.”[36]

THE GIFT OF PREBIRTH: POTENTIAL

If by some miracle we could conjure up the actual historical snapshots of the zygotes of Pope John Paul II, Adolf Hitler, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King Jr., and Joseph Stalin, it is likely that they would all look more or less the same. Over time, life events, karma, DNA,

and destiny formed these zygotes into vastly different individuals, each of whom had an immensely different influence on civilization. But at such an early stage of development, who could have said in advance what they would become? Similarly, the fetus in the womb has yet to emerge on to the earthly stage and make her mark upon the world. She exists, in that respect, in a state of pure potential. She could ultimately become a doctor who saves lives, a contractor who builds cities, a homeless schizophrenic who sleeps in a dumpster, a young girl who dies of tuberculosis, or a gifted artist who creates masterpieces. These are only a few of the millions of possibilities that lie open for her. At this nascent point in the life cycle, however, we don't know what she will become. This is the gift that the unborn child symbolizes: the gift of potential.

As adults, the fetus carries the image of all the potential that exists within us. We may have the possibility to become a singer, a scientist, an attorney, or a teacher, but have never done anything to actualize this capacity. We may have the seed of a thought—to buy a house, to marry, to write a book—that lies fallow in our untilled garden of ideas. We may have grand dreams—for the betterment of humanity, the enrichment of our community, the saving of the environment—that remain dormant in our imaginations. Like the deeds of the unborn child, these are possibilities that continue to exist in an unrealized and unformed state. It is from these source waters that everything in life emerges. Because of this, we need to develop a state of reverence toward all that is unborn: in ourselves, our families, and our communities. For it is only through such a sense of the sacredness of *potential* that anything real and enduring can be born.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT PREBIRTH

FOR YOURSELF

- Obtain a photo of a zygote (a single-celled human organism) and periodically look at it with the thought: "This is where I started . . . at least as a human body."
- Visualize or write a first-person account of what you imagine your life in the womb was like, given what you know about the circumstances of your mother's pregnancy.

- Soak in a warm bath, hot tub, or other body of water and imagine yourself in a safe, comfortable, and nurturing uterine environment.

For Friends and Family

- Do household tasks or other chores for a pregnant family member or friend, to help make her daily life easier as she approaches birth.
- Encourage an expectant mother you know who is engaged in an unhealthy lifestyle habit (smoking, alcohol, drugs) or is under stress due to emotional or relationship difficulties to seek appropriate treatment with a trained mental health professional, go through a substance abuse program, or join a recovery group.
- Provide appropriate and accurate sex information for your own teenagers, and encourage family and friends to do the same with their own adolescents, to prevent unplanned pregnancies.

For the Community

- Give to the March of Dimes or similar organizations that fight against birth defects, low birth weight, and other problems in newborns.
- Volunteer at a community prenatal clinic.
- Encourage your community's schools to set up sex education programs, particularly at the middle school and high school levels, that provide comprehensive information about human sexuality, birth control, prenatal development, and the importance of personal responsibility in making good choices about sexual behavior.

CHAPTER 2

Birth

THROUGH THE TUNNEL

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH[1]

Thomas Hobbes always used to tell people that when he was born his mother gave birth to twins: himself and fear. The British philosopher was not yet due to be born when, on a fateful day in 1588, his mother received word that the Spanish armada was about to invade England. The jolt of anxiety she received upon hearing this news sent her into premature labor, and the result was a nervous babe who would grow up to create a political philosophy based largely upon fear. His literary masterpiece, *Leviathan,* would counsel that people are best governed by a monolithic government ruling through threat and intimidation. The fear that brought Hobbes into the world accompanied him throughout his life, and itself gave birth to a political philosophy based upon mistrust that would affect millions of people worldwide.[2]

This is the kind of impact that a traumatic birth can have upon a life and a culture. But that's just the beginning of the story. Two hundred and fifty years after Hobbes's ill-timed birth, the psychoanalyst Otto Rank caused a stir among his Viennese colleagues when he suggested that *every* birth is a trauma, that most people never recover from it, and that this deep-seated birth trauma colors an individual's entire attitude toward life as she grows to maturity. Rank's mentor, Sigmund Freud, at first approved of his pupil's theory, but then changed his mind. The newborn was too narcissistic and unaware of the outside world, according to Freud, to be bothered by the trauma of birth. Rank, however, refused to compromise on this matter, and the issue finally served to create a break in their relationship. Rank went on to elaborate upon his birth trauma theory, suggesting that all later psychological difficulties and all anxieties in life, whether of spiders, the dark, or death itself, are rooted in this one primordial fear.[3]

Was birth really that scary? For those of us who dread the feeling of being stuck in a train tunnel or being cooped up in an elevator, it may certainly seem frightening to think about being squeezed inside of a womb without a view. For those of us who have gone snorkeling or scuba diving and suddenly had our air supply threatened, the prospect of our major life support system—the umbilical cord—being shut off accidentally during birth may fill us with horror as well. There's certainly enough that can go wrong during birth to start a person worrying: being born before you are ready (a premature birth), being snapped at by surgical instruments (a forceps birth or cesarean section), coming out through the vaginal opening and getting stuck, losing blood, not getting enough air, being probed and prodded, slapped and squeezed. And to make matters even worse, newborns are not big, strong adults with plenty of physical cushion and psychic defenses, but totally vulnerable, highly sensitive organisms weighing only a few pounds.

On the other hand, the idea of being born certainly sounds like it *could* be quite interesting, a natural high, in fact. After all, birth brings with it feelings of freshness, renewal, spring, opening up to life, and blossoming. Imagine the relief, after being cooped up in a tight closet for nine months, of finally getting a chance to break out of that tiny prison and experience the big beautiful world for the first time, to take a deep breath of air and drink in the dazzling array of new sensations, feelings, and energies. If the prospect of birth wasn't at least a little pleasant, then why do virtually all

the major religions of the world create rituals that, in different ways, help their members try to achieve a second birth? I mean, if it's *that* painful the first time, don't ask me to go through it again!

Some people might argue along with Freud, however, that it doesn't matter whether birth was pleasant or painful, because we weren't really *there* during birth in a conscious way, and the best proof of this is by noticing that nobody shares their birth memories at office parties or family gatherings. As author William Saroyan put it in his book titled *Births*: "No man remembers his birth, although several liars have insisted they do, and that they also remember their nine months in the womb, but let us understand that such talk is surely solely to amuse and confuse us, and perhaps it is intended to make us feel like fools because we remember nothing of the sort."[4]

As we observed in the last chapter, however, the chemical oxytocin, the angel's touch on our upper lip, and the amnesic waters of the river of Lethe may have had a big role in making us forget our perinatal experiences. There is compelling evidence for the possibility that birth memories may still be active in our psyche and working out their magic or mischief in our lives, depending upon the kind of birth we each went through. To help you understand what you may have experienced during the beginning moments of life, I'd like to take you through some of the key events that could have happened to you during your birth.

THE JOURNEY TO BE BORN

Contrary to popular belief, you were anything but a passive subject during your own birth. In fact, there's growing support for the view that as a prenatal being, you actually helped your mother decide when it was time to be born. Researchers at Cornell University suggest that the original signal to initiate labor comes from a small region of the fetus's brain in the hypothalamus called the PVN or paraventricular nucleus. The sequence of events that start the birth process happens something like this: The PVN signal causes the hypothalamus of the baby to release a chemical message to the pituitary gland, which then stimulates the release of stress hormones from the fetus's adrenal glands. These hormones travel to the mother through the placenta, where they suppress the mother's production of progesterone, a chemical that inhibits contractions and helps keep a

mother's body from expelling the baby during the nine months of pregnancy. The suppression of progesterone, in other words, starts the process of labor. Thus, in this indirect way, you signaled your mother's labor contractions.

The mother's body is also active in this process, opening and closing the chemical gates to this flow of hormones from the baby to create special windows of opportunity for birth to occur.[5] As with prebirth, there is a kind of biochemical conversation going on between mother and child that might sound something like this if it could be verbalized: Fetus: "I'm ready to be born now." Mother: "Not quite yet, wait a bit." Fetus: "But I want to be born!" Mother: "It isn't time." A few minutes or hours or days later. Fetus: "I'm waiting!" Mother: "Okay, now seems like a good time!"

Once labor starts, the birthing journey begins. Imagine you are inside of your mother's womb and her uterine muscles start to contract. You've got a cushion of water around you for protection (unless your mom's water broke already), so you're not going to be crushed to death, though it may feel like it. Up to a hundred pounds of pressure is being exerted upon your tiny form in its amniotic bubble. And of course, as you're being squeezed like a grapefruit, there's really nowhere to go except for this one place at the neck of your mother's womb. There you're pushed against an elastic wall, the cervix, that's taking its time dilating. This agony can go on for a long while as the tiny opening in the cervix expands centimeter by centimeter. First-time mothers spend an average of thirteen hours in this stage of labor.

But there's a problem. In fact, it's one of the biggest problems of human existence from a purely *body up* perspective. You've got a big head, and your mother has a tiny opening that you must get through. When we were less evolved as mammals our brains were smaller and it was no big deal to make it through the birth canal. But as our brains evolved and got larger, so did the problem of making it all the way through the tunnel. Finally, Nature said to the human brain something like: "I'm sorry, but if you get any bigger, you're never going to make it through the birth canal, and all that brilliance I've given you will be wasted! So here's what I'm going to do for you. First, I'm going to delay some of that brain growth until after birth so that the problem doesn't get any worse. Second, I'm going to put into your big basketball of a brain the know-how to figure out what to do to help your own offspring give birth." So humans became the first species to organize

others of its own kind—midwives—to assist mothers during the birth process.[6]

Meanwhile, you've got your head (or butt, if you're going to be a breech birth) pressed up against a tight little cervical window, and it's not giving you much slack. You may feel like that character in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Pit and the Pendulum," who had been placed unknowingly into a prison with walls that were closing in on him and the only way out was down a bottomless pit (Poe clearly must have had a traumatic birth himself). You're not exactly enduring this crushing experience in a dispassionate way. You start to feel the walls give way and you definitely want out. You may feel at this point like Odysseus and his men trying to escape from the Cyclops's cave (and, we should keep in mind that Cyclops was the son of Poseidon, the god of *water*).

But your mother may not be so cooperative. Birth pioneer Frederick Leboyer regarded this part of the mother-child dance as a struggle to the death. In his book *Birth Without Violence* he writes: " . . . this monstrous unremitting pressure that is crushing the baby, pushing it out toward the world—and this blind wall, which is holding it back, confining it—These things are all one: the mother! She is driving the baby out. At the same time she is holding it in, preventing its passage."[7]

Finally, the cervix reaches a diameter of ten centimeters—a little more than four inches—and your head "crowns," signaling that you are now ready to pass into the birth canal. I should mention at this point that if at any time during this whole process of birth or even before it begins something happens to go wrong, or your doctor's medical malpractice insurance premiums are about to go up, or your mother wants to avoid the mess of birth, or caretakers don't think you're up to making the trip on your own steam, then you might suddenly discover some mechanical gadgets coming down like whirligigs from the sky to surgically extract you from your mother's womb in a Cesarian section.

Assuming that this hasn't happened, you're ready for the next stage of the birth process: expulsion. You may feel like a human cannonball as you ready yourself to explode out of your mother's body. But don't get too enthusiastic yet. This stage can take a few minutes, or it may last a few hours. You'll remember that head problem I mentioned earlier. There's also the business of the rest of your body coming through the birth canal. This can be a real challenge if you're leaving feet first, arm first, or have planned

some other interesting exit strategy. You've still got this umbilical connection to your mother, and somehow you have to come out in such a way that you don't get strangled by your own cord, or push the cord into your mother's bony pelvis where it can cut off your oxygen and cause brain damage.

But assuming that everything is going along normally, your head is pressed against your own breastbone as you begin to move through the cervix on your way down the birth canal. Your head arches back as you move upward and outward into the light of day. Your neck twists to the left to assist the shoulders getting through. Then the "deliverer" gently guides your shoulders and chest out into the bright world. As soon as that's accomplished, the rest of you slips out like laundry from a chute. Tah-dah! You're born! Happy birthday!

During this whole process, you're a little bit like our hero, Odysseus, who was called "the man of twists and turns."

ETHERIZED UPON A TABLE

Of course, this wasn't necessarily the way you were actually born. Each one of us had a unique birth with its own side trips, accidents, delays, surprises, annoyances, or other peculiarities. And in many ways, the idiosyncratic nature of this natal journey was fashioned by the kind of cultural surroundings that supported or restricted your mother. Consider the possibility, for example, that like most of us in contemporary Western culture, you were born in a modern hospital setting. Anthropologist Robbie Davis-Floyd has examined the alienating, life-negating messages a woman giving birth in a conventional American hospital all too often receives from the moment she enters the front door. First, she may be whisked away in a wheelchair, an act that implies the presence of a disability. Then she goes through the "prep," when her clothes are relinquished and replaced by a bland hospital gown. After this, she may be given an enema and have her pubic hair shaved, depersonalizing her in a way not unlike inmates in a prison or marines in boot camp.

Once in bed, she is attached to intravenous tubes and electronic monitors that further reinforce the image of her being sick and dependent. If her labor is not fast enough to conform to the hospital's time charts, then, as mentioned in the last chapter, she might be given a drug like Pitocin to

speed up contractions. An internal fetal monitor may be inserted into her vagina, causing the rupture of placental membranes. Strangers—medical personnel, that is—may come around and periodically stick their gloved fingers into her vagina to check her cervical dilation, potentially introducing bacteria into the birth canal. She might be given epidural anesthesia to numb out the lower portion of her body to kill the pain of birth.

Getting ready for the actual birth, she may be placed on a table in the lithotomy position, with feet up in the air and buttocks hanging over the table's edge—not exactly your high dignity position. Then, to create a bigger opening for the baby, she is likely to have her perineum cut in a procedure called an episiotomy, an intervention done in about a third of all hospital births.[8] If there are complications during delivery, the doctor may use forceps or do a C-section (cesarean birth) to pull you out. Even if there are no complications, the doctor may do a C-section anyway, as they are now performed during more than 30 percent of all births in the United States despite the fact that they put the mother at three times greater risk of death.[9]

After the birth, the umbilical cord is usually cut quickly, any bloody remains washed away to maintain the hospital's sterile field, and the baby is snatched away from the mom at which time it is cleaned, given injections and eye drops, tested for certain diseases, and assigned an Apgar score to determine if it needs emergency care. While the baby may be given back to the mother for a brief "bonding period," the baby is usually then taken away for a four-hour separation period and put in a clean bassinet next to other babies who have gone through the same ritual.[10]

You can imagine the impact all of this has on your mother's physical and emotional state. Just the very fact of her being moved from familiar surroundings—home, friends, and family—into the impersonal space of a hospital could have had negative consequences. Animal studies suggest that being moved out of familiar surroundings during critical life cycle events like giving birth can cause a range of significant negative physiological and behavioral effects, from spontaneous abortions and stillbirths to impairment of mothering behaviors.[11] Administration of drugs to help your mother cope with the pain of birth, including tranquilizers, sleeping medications, painkillers, or anesthetics, could also have profoundly affected the birth process. These drugs may have dulled your mother's responses, affected the

rhythm of her contractions, and kept her from fully participating in the process of giving birth to you.

What this means is that all the millions of years of evolutionary wisdom stored up in your mother's body telling her exactly what to do at each step of the way in giving birth to you was, at best, largely untapped or even seriously undermined. Psychologist Arthur Janov writes in his book *Imprints: The Lifelong Effects of the Birth Experience*, "After administration of drugs, the mother's uterine contractions grow fewer and weaker. Worse, drugs block important neural messages so that the sequence of contractions from back to front is also altered. This means that the baby is less apt to be propelled forward in a smooth way. Most often, it is squeezed and mashed by the out-of-sync contractions—a bit like going through a compacting machine."[12] Moreover, since anesthetics can pass through the placental barrier, then *you* might have been numbed out by the drugs as well and not been fully present for the most significant event in your life: your own birth.

Even if you *were* there for the birth, it wasn't likely to be a picnic if it was a typical hospital delivery. You probably had these strange feelers intruding upon you—monitors and probing fingers, or perhaps metal forceps and other surgical instruments—interfering with those biological rhythms of yours that were helping to propel you through the tunnel. You probably received fear hormones from your mother—biological reflections of her own state of disorientation, alienation, and anxiety—pouring through the umbilical cord and overloading your own stressed-out nervous system.

When you were born—before you'd had a chance to get your own respiratory system going—the doctor may have cut your umbilical cord too soon, severing your oxygen supply to your mother and leaving you to struggle in a death agony for the least little bit of air. And by snatching you away from your mother's body, the doctor was essentially destroying the only home you knew. Finally, the doctor may have dangled you briefly in midair and placed you on a cold metallic platform, where he probably put stinging drops in your eyes and injected you with needles while you stared up at artificial neon lights. It makes a person wonder whether all those stories of UFOs and alien abductions in the tabloids aren't just birth memories that have been suddenly and dramatically recalled.

BEING "SUNG" INTO THE WORLD

Compare the above experiences with the way your birth might have proceeded at any other time in human history except during the last hundred years, or even in many parts of the "undeveloped" world today. Chances are, your mother would have given birth at home surrounded by family and friends. She would have had help from others: women specially trained and gifted in the art of birth assistance. She would have been able to walk around during labor, and even been able to continue with her normal activities until close to the actual birth. She might have been given a birth stool to squat on, or backed up against a tree or wall for support, or had women holding her while she readied herself. Midwives might have massaged her in special ways to assist with the contractions.

Special rituals, charms, chants, or other symbolic activities could have helped to create a climate of confidence, warmth, and sacredness. At the moment of birth, you might simply have dropped out of your mother into a hole in the ground, where you would have been held by Mother Earth, or fallen into the arms of your family members or into a soft bundle of cloth. Or you might have been "sung" into the world with a grandmother chanting in imitation of your birth cry.[13]

Finally birthed, you might have had a family member breathe into your nostrils to put the sacred spirit into you. A grandmother might have massaged your body with oil. Your umbilical cord might have been kept intact until the throbbing died away, and then cut with the teeth, or a shell, or piece of bamboo, which would have then been put around you or stored as a sacred necklace. Your placenta might have been regarded as sacred as well, perhaps planted under a tree (as we noted in the previous chapter) that then became your own "destiny tree." Your family might have welcomed you with rituals and ceremonies appropriate to their own vision of the cosmos.

Your birth would have had meaning and purpose, and a natural context within which every event leading up to and through it would have had deep cultural and spiritual significance. During such a birth, fear would be naturally present, but it would have been mediated through well-designed social support systems rather than through the culturally barren directives of scientific progress. Your own natural instincts to be born, and your mother's biological drive to give birth to you, would have been understood—not

subdued, denied, or etherized—and would have been supported through a rich storehouse of indigenous knowledge and cultural lore.[14]

NATURAL BIRTH IN MODERN TIMES

To be fair, there *was* a darker side to being born before the advent of science, a side that still plays itself out in too many parts of the world today. Malnutrition on your mother's part could have devastated your prenatal development and left you or your mother too weak to survive. Without antibiotics, the risk of catastrophic infection for both you and your mother was an ever-present reality. If you didn't look strong and healthy at birth, or if you were a girl, there was a strong likelihood of your being snuffed out on the spot.[15] Even if you had survived all this, instead of being welcomed with open arms, you might have immediately had your ears pierced or air blown up your anus, or a family member might have whirled you around in a basket that was then let go of, sending you hurtling into the dust; a procedure intended to "shock" you out of the *spirit down* world that you came from, and into the *body up* world that you needed to adapt to.

Being born in most cultures around the world was and still is a hazardous undertaking. However, the essential principles of nontechnological birth—giving birth at home among family and friends within a coherent cultural and spiritual meaning-system—still has much to recommend it compared with being born among high-tech strangers in an alien hospital environment. The challenge for mothers in the modern era is to discover ways to link the best aspects of traditional birthing methods with the safety features of science and technology. This is exactly what has been happening in the alternative birthing movement over the past sixty years. Starting with the work of British obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read in 1933, a wide range of natural childbirth methods have been developed as a regular part of modern medical practice.[16]

You may have been born under such conditions, where your mother was allowed to go through labor and birth with minimal or no pain medication and the emotional support of a birth attendant to help her relax and trust the natural processes of birth. If your mother used the Bradley method of birth she would have been encouraged, with her husband's assistance, to accept the pain of birth without medications, to scream or cry loudly if she wished, and to treat each moment of labor as part of the total experience of birth.[17]

Or if she prepared for birth through the Lamaze method, she would have been allowed to use pain medication as needed, discouraged from engaging in loud crying, and taught specific breathing exercises, again with the father's help, to perform in synchrony with contractions and physical "pushing," to calm her and help her disassociate from the pain of birth.[18]

If your mother had been influenced by the teachings of Frederick Leboyer, your birth might have taken place in a quiet and dark environment—to remove disturbing stimuli—and been followed by a soothing warm bath and lots of physical contact between you and mom.[19] You might have been born in a birthing center—a facility within a hospital or part of a health-care center—which would have provided a homelike atmosphere for labor and birth with the ready availability of emergency medical care if necessary. You might have been a water baby: born in a swimming pool or other body of water to help ease the transition from your watery womb. Or, you might have been born at home with the help of a midwife or other nonmedical birth assistant.[20]

The most common argument given by those who feel reluctant to explore alternative birthing options—especially those that involve being away from a traditional hospital environment—is that they aren't safe for either the mother or the baby. However, research suggests that planned homebirths with certified professional midwives in North America are as safe as hospital births for low-risk moms and are associated with lower rates of medical intervention.[21] In the Netherlands, where midwife-attended homebirth is practiced by up to one-third of all mothers, infant mortality is 4.96 per 1,000 births compared with 6.43 per 1,000 in the United States, where less than 1 percent of births occur at home.[22]

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY OF BIRTH

Quite apart from the physical risks involved in a traditional hospital birth, there are deep emotional wounds that can scar a child for the rest of her life. Most hospital births take place under the assumption that the fetus cannot feel or sense what is going on around her. A thousand-year-old tradition contradicts this view. Eleventh-century Tibetan Buddhist monk Milarepa wrote: "I will explain the suffering of birth . . . In nine months it emerges from the womb in pain excruciating, as if pulled out gripped by pliers. When from the womb its head is squeezed, the pain is like being thrown

into a bramble pit . . . When from the baby's tender body the blood and filth are being cleansed, the pain is like being flayed alive. When the umbilical cord is cut, it feels as though the spine were severed."[23]

Contemporary research by pre- and perinatal scientists studying birth memories seems to demonstrate that many people actually *do* remember their birth when they go through hypnosis or some other method of accessing deeper states of consciousness. Obstetrician David Cheek, for example, in a study using hypnosis reported that subjects were able to demonstrate the exact movements of their head and shoulders during birth, knowledge that is usually known only to those with specialized obstetrical training.[24] Psychologist David Chamberlain studied mother-child pairs. The children ranged in age from nine to twenty-three and reported no previous conscious memories of their birth. The mothers indicated that they had shared no details of the birth with their children. Under hypnosis, mother and child reports showed remarkable similarities. Children accurately identified birth details such as the time of day, locale, people who were present, surgical instruments used, position of delivery, behavior of doctors and nurses, room layouts, and sequences of events.[25]

Especially intriguing is the research done by Stanislav Grof, a Czechoslovakian-born psychiatrist and former director of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. During the 1960s, when the use of drugs such as LSD and psilocybin was still legal and approved by the U.S. government for psychiatric research, Dr. Grof and his colleagues used psychedelic therapy to effectively treat mental disorders such as alcoholism and depression.[26] Grof noticed that individuals going through treatment sometimes had the sensation of being choked around the neck, experienced difficulty breathing, or felt stabbing pains in their navel or elsewhere in their body. These perceptions were often accompanied by images of tunnels, engulfment, torture, feelings of claustrophobia, excruciating pain, or alternatively, ecstatic rapture. Grof began to suspect that his patients were re-experiencing the trauma of birth, just as Otto Rank had predicted decades earlier. Out of hundreds of case histories of this kind, Grof formulated a conceptual model that helped make sense of the experience of being born. According to Grof, the process of birth involves four primary stages or what he calls Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs).[27]

The first stage, or Basic Perinatal Matrix I (BPM I), is the period before labor has begun, when the fetus remains in a relatively undisturbed state within the mother. Grof's patients undergoing BPM I experienced the sensations of a "good womb" (e.g., cosmic unity, satisfaction of needs, feelings of fulfillment, a sense of harmony), and/or a "bad womb" (e.g., feelings of engulfment, threats of disease, emotional upheavals from the mother).

The second stage, Basic Perinatal Matrix II (BPM II), is the stage of birth when labor has begun but the cervix has not yet fully dilated. Grof's patients going through BPM II experiences often felt immense physical or emotional suffering, a sense of being trapped or confined without hope, and/or deep feelings of victimization and endless torture.

The third stage, or BPM III, is that point in the process where the cervix has fully dilated and the baby starts to move through the birth canal toward the outside world. Patients in this stage would often feel themselves going through a cosmic death-rebirth struggle that involved excruciating pain and pleasure, volcanic-like intensity, and/or a sense of imminent violence or danger.

The fourth and final stage, Basic Perinatal Matrix IV (BPM IV), is that point when the baby has emerged from the womb and the umbilical cord is cut. Patients going through BPM IV states would experience a feeling of enormous decompression or expansion of space, images of rebirth and redemption, as well as unpleasant sensations related to navel pain, loss of breath, or fear of death.

Grof's theory was that these patients were re-experiencing their own births, releasing the trauma and integrating the healing associated with each stage of the birth process. According to Grof, we all to some extent carry repressed birth experiences into life with us that can have significant negative consequences for our later physical and emotional health. Specific unresolved traumas or complications that occur at each stage of birth can pop up as physical, emotional, or mental difficulties in later life. The hellish intrauterine memories of artist Salvador Dalí that we discussed in the last chapter may represent a good example of a BPM I "bad womb" experience. Perhaps Dalí's strange surrealistic paintings are both a reflection of those horrors as well as an attempt to come to grips with his difficult birth through creative expression.

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre may represent a good example of a BPM II baby. Like Thomas Hobbes, his negative experiences in his mother's womb could have been formative to his philosophy (existentialism), which is based on the need to take decisive action in a menacing and meaningless universe. In Sartre's play *No Exit,* a work that takes place in a small room representing hell, people torture each other without even trying. This sounds a lot like BPM II, where the fetus is being compacted by the mother's contractions but as yet has no way out due to the nondilated cervix. Interestingly, Sartre once took a psychedelic substance under the supervision of a psychiatrist but found the feeling of losing control disagreeable and he vowed never to touch the stuff again.[28]

The trauma associated with BPM III, when the baby begins a bloody struggle out of the womb, may express itself in adulthood among those individuals who espouse or practice violence, including rapists, murderers, terrorists, and tyrants. Adolf Hitler may have been a BPM III baby. In his speech to the German people on June 22, 1941, Hitler refers to how the Allied forces "would have been ready to strangle and defeat the German Reich." He speaks of "preparing the rebirth of the Reich." His talk contains other telling references to fears that he had of Germany's "struggle," "encirclement," and potential "extermination." Over the course of his dictatorship, Hitler had many of his most hated enemies hanged, and one historian even argues that Hitler himself was strangled to death by a member of his inner circle in his Berlin bunker in 1945.[29] These clues lead me to wonder whether Hitler may have been threatened with strangulation from the umbilical cord during his own birth. As strange as it may seem, his path toward unparalleled violence could have been laid down as he was fighting his way out of his mother's womb.[30]

BPM IV experiences, those dealing with the actual expulsion from the mother, may be associated with religious leaders who have undergone a spiritual death-rebirth experience. These conversion or transformation experiences may in some sense have been a transcendent mirroring or even psychological completion of their physical birth. While psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's biography of Martin Luther, for example, focuses on the role of his overbearing father as a factor in Luther's religious conversion during a violent thunderstorm, it may be truer to look back to Luther's birth experience.[31] Similarly, the biblical Saul's vision on the road to Damascus, Blaise Pascal's "night of fire" religious conversion, and other dramatic

religious conversion stories may represent the emergence, after a lifetime of repression, of the fireworks that took place at the end of the birth canal.[32]

These fireworks, buried as they are in most of us, represent an amazing and untold part of our life story. In retrospect, after looking back at all that we have surveyed in this chapter, it seems incredible to me that more individuals in our society have not recognized the psychological importance of the birth process in our later lives. The fact that the fetus at five months has about as many brain cells as the average adult should give us pause when we begin to doubt the impact of birth on our emotional well-being. Even Freud pointed out that a mother's uterus is the one place everybody in the world can definitively say they've lived. That means every person on the planet has had the experience of coming out of his mother's womb and seeing the world for the first time. And what a dramatic experience that must have been! As poet and historian William MacNeile Dixon put it: "Birth is the sudden opening of a window, through which you look out upon a stupendous prospect. For what has happened? A miracle. You have exchanged nothing for the possibility of everything."[33]

THE GIFT OF BIRTH: HOPE

During the first nine months of life, the unborn child gestates as pure potential. At birth, everything changes. Now the child comes out of the womb on to the world stage and anything can happen. We don't yet know *what* will happen, but we do know that our expectations are infused with *hope*. In the Bible, John 16:21 says: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world." The birth of a child is like the dawn, the spring, or the beginning of a new era, and in beginnings there is always hope. There is the hope that the child will thrive and prosper, the hope that the child will brighten the lives of those around him, and the hope that he will contribute in some way to making the world a better place in which to live.

The significance of birth as a symbol in our own adult lives, then, is the promise of new life; the hope that new and great things will be born in us from moment to moment. We can ask ourselves in each moment: "What is

currently being born in me?" A new job? A new relationship? A new spiritual outlook? Whatever is emerging in our inner or outer lives, the gift of birth gives us the hope that it will lead to wonderful things. The job will lead us, perhaps, to the use of new abilities. The relationship will lead to us to new levels of intimacy. The spiritual outlook will expand our horizons beyond the daily grind of existence. When we treat new things in our lives with the same hopeful expectancy that a mother has for her newborn child, we immeasurably increase the probability that over time these events will flourish beyond our wildest dreams.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT BIRTH

FOR YOURSELF

- Inquire about the circumstances of your birth from family, friends, archives, or other sources.
- Engage in psychotherapy with a trained mental health professional who has expertise in treating birth trauma and other perinatal issues (for more information, contact The Association for Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology and Health, P.O. Box 1398, Forestville, CA 95436; apppah@aol.com; www.birthpsychology.com).
- Create an artwork that vividly depicts what you imagine to have been your personal experience of being born.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Help an expectant mom you know choose an appropriate birth method to meet her needs from among a range of alternatives (see, for example, the book *Gentle Birth Choices: A Guide to Making Informed Decisions About Birthing Centers, Birth Attendants, Water Birth, Home Birth, and Hospital Birth*, by Barbara Harper and Suzanne Arms).
- Serve as a birth coach to a close family member or friend who is expecting.
- Assist a pregnant family member or friend in creating a meaningful ritual to welcome her baby into the world.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Contribute financially to an organization that supports safe alternative birthing practices in technological societies, or that promotes safe medical births in undeveloped countries.
- Train as a midwife, doula, or other birthing paraprofessional to assist others in the birth process.
- Volunteer in the maternity wing of a hospital to assist with various tasks such as providing emotional support to expectant mothers, running errands, and providing child care.

CHAPTER 3

Infancy

LEGENDS OF THE FALL

Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my angel-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, celestial thought.

—HENRY VAUGHAN[1]

The Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan once remarked that the infant is an exile from paradise and that is why her first expression on earth is a cry. Like so many poets, mystics, and other "rememberers," Inayat Khan believed that the infant comes *down from the spirit* before taking birth in a human body. He was aware that most people regard infancy as a time of ignorance, but believed that infants "can perceive or can receive impressions of human beings much more readily than grown-up people." He also observed that infants have an appreciation of music that goes far beyond that of most adults. "The infant is music itself," he wrote. "In the cradle it is moving its little arms and legs in a certain rhythm. And when our music falls on the ears of an infant it is of the lowest character compared with the music it is accustomed to."[2] The infant, in Inayat Khan's view, has descended from the stars and is still listening to the Music of the Spheres.

At birth, however, the infant's soul descends into matter and the memory of a celestial life diminishes. During the actual process of birth the

newborn is usually positioned *head-downward* and falls away from the uterus into the world. In many cultures, where birthing takes place in a squatting position, the infant literally falls into a prepared hole in the ground.[3] This "fall" is one of the central themes of human culture. It is the story of Adam and Eve's fall from grace and their exile from the Garden of Eden. It is the story of humanity's falling away from the Golden Age as told in Greek, Persian, Sumerian, and Indian myths. It is the fall of the individual in Tibetan Buddhism away from the Clear Light of Primary Reality into the maelstrom of its own karmic deeds at rebirth. And, it is also the story of the fall of the soul of the infant into the constraints of material existence. The spirit, once so free to roam, now finds itself stuck in the muck, so to speak, having to contend with all manner of inner and outer forces that it has no control over. The process of *growing up from the body* consists in learning how to gain some degree of control over these material forces and in discovering how to find one's way in a world that has its own rhymes and reasons, and its own terrible gravity to conquer.

THE MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION

It takes a lot of time and care to accomplish this task of rising up from the rubble in the earliest stages of human development. Had you been born as an elephant you could have run with the herd shortly after birth. If you had been born as a baby seal you would have been able to swim the high seas at six weeks of age. But since you were born as a human being, you entered the world highly dependent upon others. In a sense, every human being is born prematurely. Psychoanalyst Adolph Portmann suggested that human beings were designed for a twenty-one-month gestation period, nine months of it taking place inside the womb, and another year of "extrauterine" development required to bring the infant to a minimal state of self-sufficiency (with, of course, many more years required for total independence).[4]

There are good evolutionary reasons for this arrangement. As we noted in the last chapter, the larger brain size of human beings served as an asset when it came to being smart enough to figure out how to adapt to a changing environment, but it posed a distinct problem at birth: how to get that large head through the birth canal. On average, the human skull at birth is 101.8 percent the size of the birth canal. Nature's solution was to delay

some of that brain development until *after* birth. Not only did this keep the size of your head at birth from becoming watermelon-sized, but it also meant that your brain could keep on developing outside of the womb.

This meant that the structure of your brain could be tailored to a certain extent according to the specific environment in which you were born. Nature essentially worked it out so that a large portion of your brain, especially areas in your neocortex, could remain "uncommitted" in infancy, and thus could wait to see what was going to happen in the outer environment before being hardwired. Brain research over the past thirty years has demonstrated that environmental stimulation can strengthen connections between brain cells in human beings, especially in the early years, and conversely, that environmental deprivation can weaken or eliminate those connections.[5] Nature provided this convenient scenario in part so that depending upon what you needed in order to survive in your environment, your brain would be able to maintain those neural connections that promoted your survival and eliminate those linkages that weren't important to your thriving. This property of *plasticity*, as it's called, has distinct advantages over species that are hardwired at birth and thus can't adapt to changing circumstances in the outside world. To put it more bluntly, if we had been hardwired to respond at birth to the world in a fixed way like some of our primitive ancestors, we'd likely be fossils in some antediluvian lakebed!

Nowhere is this interaction between brain and environment more important than in the mother-child relationship in infancy. From the moment of birth, your mother—or primary caretaker—was the locus of mediation between your brain and the world. She was the one with the greatest responsibility for stimulating your brain, and thus the one best equipped to help strengthen those neural connections that would enable you to survive and thrive in the unique circumstances of your surroundings. Millions of years of evolution led up to this moment in time and endowed both you and your mother with an extraordinary ability to tune into each other to make the system work.

Your dreamy large eyes and cute bulging forehead were designed by Nature to elicit biologically based nurturing behaviors from your mother. Your near-sightedness at birth (20/150 vision) suited your relationship to your mother very well, since you could see only about six inches around you, a circumference that just took in your mother's face and body. As you

gazed into your mother's face you optimally saw yourself, your moods, and your energies mirrored there in her frowns, her smiles, her *oohs* of sympathy and her *ahs* of understanding. The feel of her touch, the caress of her hands, the sound of her voice, and the taste of the milk from her nipples released hormones that comforted and calmed you. Your mother also produced chemicals that stimulated nurturing feelings in her. In fact, the same amnesia-producing neuropeptide (oxytocin) that may have caused you to forget your spiritual origins at birth served in the days and weeks after birth to stimulate your mother's own nurturing behaviors toward you. Research shows, for example, that mother rats given a drug blocking their natural production of oxytocin cease all nurturing behaviors.[6]

It's commonly observed that many mothers have an uncanny ability to sense the needs of their infants. Their hearing seems to be heightened and their ability to discriminate between different types of crying—angry, sad, hurt, scared—is legendary. Attuned mothers appear to be able to tell when infants are about to wet or soil themselves or are about to cry for food. One psychiatrist, Jan Ehrenwald, even suggested that the origins of Extrasensory Perception (ESP) go back to the earliest experiences of communication between mother and infant. He speculated that ESP evolved as a way for mother and infant to alert each other to urgent survival-related needs before the infant developed the ability to communicate using verbal language.[7]

The mother—and to a lesser extent, the father and other care providers—serves as a kind of psychic shock absorber for the infant against all of the unpredictabilities of the world: the bumps, thumps, flashes, and crashes of the outside environment, and the pain, wet, cold, heat, fear, and hunger of the world inside of the infant's body. Studies suggest that secure attachment between mother and infant during the first years of life provides a buffer or a kind of emotional vaccination against stressful events in later life. Older kids who are securely attached in infancy, for example, produce less cortisol (a stress hormone that can cause physical and psychological damage from chronic exposure) than kids who as infants were not as securely attached to their mothers. They also have higher self-esteem, lower rates of psychopathology, and enjoy more successful peer relationships and academic success.[8]

THE HAND THAT BLOCKS THE CRADLE

Emotional attunement during the first years of life appears to be the social-emotional glue of the world, bonding the mother to the infant, and the growing child to all of his subsequent relationships in life, including his own future role as a parent. A look at the world situation, however, reveals many tears and breaks in that social-emotional fabric. Divorce, estrangement, feuds, conflicts, crimes, wars, and looming catastrophes all threaten the harmony of our lives and even the continued existence of our species. The failure of attachment, or the breakdown of nature's exquisite plan for bonding an infant to its mother, may lie at the core of many of these social ills and deserves our very careful attention here for what it can teach us about healing early emotional scars before they grow into massive psychosocial wounds in later life.

Toward the end of World War II, scientists first became aware of the devastating consequences of the lack of emotional nurturing in infancy. Psychoanalyst René Spitz compared children institutionally reared in a war-time orphanage with those raised by their own mothers in a prison nursery. The orphanage infants—those who were led and clothed but not held, played with, or talked to—had higher rates of physical illness, failure to gain weight, emotional disturbance, and infant mortality.[9] Years later, psychologist John Bowlby examined how the chronically abandoned infant responded to frequent experiences of separation. He observed that an infant goes through three distinct stages of separation anxiety: First the baby protests the separation by crying, screaming, and flailing about. If no help comes, he then goes through a stage of despair with diminished activity, monotone crying, and gradual withdrawal. Finally, with continued neglect there begins a detachment stage when he becomes passive, unresponsive, and "emotionally dead" even when care eventually does arrive.[10] He enters the realm of T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, "where . . . the dead tree gives no shelter, . . ."[11]

Initially, attachment disorders were examined in impersonal institutional settings like hospitals and orphanages. But in the last thirty years, there's been a great deal of clinical research showing how bonding problems show up in daily mother-child interactions. Child researcher and psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler observed mothers' behaviors with their infants and discovered many underlying pathologies. These included mothers who couldn't tolerate their babies' rejections of them because they reminded

them of their own mothers' rejections when they were small; mothers who wouldn't let their infants explore the world because of their own fears of loss and abandonment, and mothers who narcissistically treated their infants as extensions of themselves rather than little beings with their own independent lives. Mahler wrote about one mother who "proudly breast-fed her babies, but only because it was convenient . . . it made her feel successful and efficient."[12] Regardless of how the mother-infant breakdown occurs, the consequences of impaired contact between mother and child during the first year of life can be devastating. Researchers have linked attachment disorders during infancy to a long list of problems in later life, including depression; anxiety disorders; eating disorders; and conduct disorders; violence; sex offenses; borderline personality disorder; physical illness; suicide; alcoholism; and drug abuse.

The link between attachment problems in infancy and violent behavior later on in life is particularly troublesome. Child advocate and neuropsychologist James W. Prescott has been particularly vocal in highlighting this connection. He has challenged the criminal justice system "to find one murderer, rapist, or drug addict in any correctional facility in America who has been breast-fed for 'two years and beyond' as recommended by the World Health Organization."[13] He suggests that if we spent more time, money, and attention on promoting healthy mother-child interactions during the first two years of life, then we might have considerably greater success in preventing crime in our communities. On a broader scale, the violence of war may be tracked back not only to a despotic leader's negative birth experiences, but to his abuse as an infant as well. A tyrant or dictator, after all, is in many respects just an infant who has been chronically roused into an emotional state of rage by overwhelming shame from a parent or caregiver, and now has the body, mind, and skills of an adult—plus a whole cadre of similarly raging infantile adults—to assist him in exacting revenge on others for his injuries.[14]

THROUGH THE EYES OF AN INFANT

The process of tracing the tyranny of some world leaders back to infancy raises broader questions about the inner world of the infant. What really *is* the subjective experience of an infant anyway? Can we ever really know for

sure? These questions were rarely even asked historically because the young infant was regarded as having no real subjective experiences of its own. The British philosopher John Locke considered the newborn infant's mind a "blank slate" passively waiting to receive impressions from the outside world. American philosopher and psychologist William James called the newborn's experience "a bloomin' buzzin' confusion." As we saw in the last chapter, Freud thought of the newborn as a self-absorbed narcissist totally unaware of the outer world. And as recently as the 1980s, many physicians in the United States assumed that babies didn't have a nervous system sophisticated enough to feel pain.[15]

Over the past several years, however, researchers have developed a very different view of the infant's inner life, suggesting that from birth the infant is consciously seeking to make sense of the world. Through ingenious experiments that measure an infant's sucking, head turning, and gazing patterns (babies spend more time attending to things that interest them) scientists have been able to demonstrate a baby's preferences from the moment of birth. Studies suggest, for example, that the newborn has proclivities for looking at curved versus straight objects, patterns rather than plain fields, and human faces over inanimate objects.[16] Most of these preferences are highly adaptive in directing the infant's attention toward human beings who can provide nurturing behaviors. As infant researcher Daniel Stern points out: "Almost from the moment of birth, [the infant] has a capacity for perception, and a cognitive competence that enables it to initiate affective interactive exchanges with its mother."[17]

But what does this look like from the infant's point of view? This is certainly impossible to convey with words, since the infant lives in a preverbal world. The word *infant* literally means "unable to speak." Artists who work with nonverbal media come closest perhaps to conveying some of the subjective experiences of the infant. In writing about Mozart's *Piano Sonata in A Minor*, for example, biographer Maynard Solomon hears in the juxtaposition of calm and dissonant passages in the andante section representations of "an infancy-Eden of unsurpassable beauty but also a state completely vulnerable to terrors of separation, loss, and even fears of potential annihilation."[18] Similarly, pediatrician and child psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott observed in the grotesque and misshapen portraits of contemporary British artist Francis Bacon an attempt to work out the

infant's experience of seeing and being seen by his mother. He writes: "Bacon . . . is seeing himself in his mother's face, but with some twist in him or her that maddens both him and us."[19] Finally, there's the testimony of the Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, whose barely coherent diaries mirror his own deeply fragmented state, yet whose frenzied dances may have expressed the shimmering vitality of an infant. Nijinsky wrote: "I work with my hands and feet and head and eyes and nose and tongue and hair and skin and stomach and guts. . . ."[20]

The best metaphor with which to characterize an infant's experience may be a creative fusion of some of the above elements that takes place through a combination of physical, visual, auditory, and emotional expression; a kind of pre-verbal Wagnerian opera or *Gesamkunstwerke* ("synthesis of the arts"). Recent infancy research suggests that infants do not separate their perceptions into seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, but rather experience a unity of the senses. In one study, three-week-old infants were blindfolded and given either a smooth or a nubbed pacifier to suck on. After the pacifiers were taken away and the blindfolds removed, infants had an opportunity to look at both kinds of pacifiers. Results showed that babies looked longer at the pacifiers they had sucked on, indicating an underlying unity in their kinesthetic and visual-perceptual channels.

Babies also show the ability to associate musical experiences with visual ones. In a related study, babies looked at two balls bouncing at different rates and making no sounds. They then correctly matched a *boing, boing, boing* sound with the visual ball that was bouncing in synchrony with that particular musical pattern. Other research has shown that babies can watch a silent video of a face "expressing either the *ah* sound or the *ee* sound and match the correct audio recording to the appropriate face."[21]

This unity of the senses may occur because infants experience things as *energies* rather than as discrete objects bounded by Kantian time and space and clothed in discrete sensory packages.[22] Daniel Stern employs the term *vitality affects* in attempting to describe the subjective experience of the infant, suggesting that since we can't possibly know a baby's inner life, we must "invent" it as best we can. In his view, the infant experiences constant shifts of energy that can be described by such terms as "surging," "fading away," "fleeting," "explosive," "crescendo," "decrescendo," "bursting," and "drawing out."[23]

Most of us will recognize the experience of *vitality affects* after only a few minutes of playing with a baby. Your voice changes from a normal adult register to one that squeaks, modulates, trills, ascends, and descends, all according to instinct: "oooo! . . . lookit the cuuuutie bebeeee!" Your face comes alive in a mimelike display of grimaces, grins, pouts, frowns, and looks of surprise or astonishment. Your body moves differently, too, often conforming to your voice and face as you crescendo toward the infant with the two of you exploding together in laughter or surprise. You feel yourself tuning in to the emotions of the baby—frowning when he frowns, laughing when he laughs—and naturally mirroring your own actions to those of the infant. These multisensory performances of ours that seem to come out of nowhere provide direct evidence of how nature equips us with behaviors necessary to promote the positive well-being and the ultimate survival of the babies in our care.

You've probably also witnessed adults who *lack* these instinctive behaviors in their interactions with babies: individuals afflicted with what I like to call B.A.D.D.—"Baby Attunement Deficit Disorder," a potentially species-ending disorder. They're smiling brightly while the baby is crying his eyes out. They have an artificial quality to their voices when they talk to the infant like they're *trying* to do the right thing, but it all comes out forced and strange: "Does BAY-beee want a CRACK-er?" Or they make the infant conform to *their* moods rather than vice versa, as if they were saying something like: "Oh baby, I'm so sad today, can you comfort me?" Or they're like a really bad blind date, where the girl accidentally elbows the boy, and the boy drops his bouquet of flowers and steps on the girl's foot when he picks it up. The chemistry is all wrong. Perhaps most devastatingly, instead of trying to "dance" with infants' rhythms, B.A.D.D. adults often ignore, insult, or actively seek to suppress their symphony of vitality. Imagine this kind of dissonance going on for days, weeks, or months at a time, with the infant living in the midst of horribly unattuned parents or caregivers, and it's not hard to understand the kind of pain this must inflict—pain that gets passed on to the rest of the world when that baby reaches adulthood.

BABIES IN THE MYTHIC WORLD

As suggested earlier, the experiences of infants aren't blocked into neat categories of social, emotional, cognitive, perceptual, and moral development, and it grieves me to see textbooks on infant development organized around these lifeless categories. Your life as an infant wasn't marked out by the sequential passage of specific events taking place in Euclidean space. There was no real autobiographical memory, which is why your earliest *ordinary* memories of life rarely extend back that far. You experienced the world almost as if you'd stumbled into a nonstop funhouse, tunnel of love, roller coaster, and house of horrors all wrapped up into one.

Imagine being swooped up suddenly by a face that gets bigger and bigger and smells all perfumey and feels all greasy, but you have a feeling of heart-love from it that hurts a little bit, too, and then being whooshed up in the air, and plopped back down on the ground, and left behind in the dust. And while all this "outside" stuff is going on, events are happening with as much fury "inside" of you, and you're not even really clear on the difference between the two. A swelling feeling starts to grow in your bottom, and feels good for a while, but then it starts to feel like a "bursting" and you cry, but no one comes and it explodes, and then "ahhhhhh . . .," it feels so nice and warm and soft, but still no one comes, and it gets cooler and it starts to feel like "burning" and "sticky" and you cry, and still no one comes and you feel like a beached whale stuck in a carpet of wet cow dung, and no one comes and you're starting to feel hungry, like a gaping pit of gnawing leeches are in your stomach, and no one comes, and you feel like it's your Dark Night of the Soul, and still no one comes.

And when help finally does appear, it comes not in the form of individual persons as we know them in adulthood, but rather as larger-than-life entities that could perhaps best be compared to the gods, goddesses, and other supernatural beings of Homer's *The Odyssey.* Enter Circe, who trains her seductive eyes on you and, instead of cleaning you and giving you her nurturing breast, poisons you and turns you into a squealing beast. Or enter the Lestrogynians, the cannibals that ate Odysseus's men, who threaten to annihilate you with one gulp. Or maybe it's your lucky day and the goddess Athena enters the room and lays you on white linen and cleans you and sanctifies you to the gods, while Demeter (the Greek goddess of the Earth) offers you nourishment from her fecund body. Possibly, too, father Zeus comes around to send off a thunderbolt of anger, while the music of the

Sirens drifts through the air to remind you of where you came from before you got yourself into this mess called a physical body.[24]

Keep in mind that the various facets, qualities, traits, aspirations, and characteristics of mother and father have not yet been assimilated or coordinated by the baby's perceptions into anything like what we would call an individual human being in adulthood. Instead, the infant sees different aspects of mother or father fused together as holistic experiences. The polytheism of *The Odyssey* is actually a good comparison to the vivid diversity and kaleidoscopic changes that take place in the infant's experience of others. Remember, too, that the infant isn't watching these animated mythic creatures dance before his eyes like a Saturday morning TV cartoon. These early experiences of others are often referred to in psychoanalytic literature as "objects" or "images," but this can be misleading because they're not actually things or visual perceptions.[25] They're actually more like "kinesthetic-emotional-visual-musical-everything-comes-at-once" events. It makes a person wonder how the infant can possibly stand such an intense surging of experience, cope with such a rapidly changing succession of powerful emotional images, or fend off the impact of demons and deities that are particularly horrific or devastating.

The answer to this question lies in the existence of an integrating force that psychologists have referred to as the "ego" or "self." I'd like to suggest that this self may be closely related to the *spirit down* soul of the infant; a soul stuck in the mud of materiality, as it were, but one that seeks to shine its light out of the mire and climb its way up through the maelstrom of existence. Right from the very start of life this integrative principle appears and begins to make order out of the uncontrollable surge of life events that unfold in and around the baby's body.

Daniel Stern has studied the different phases of the development of self during the first two years of life.[26] According to Stern, from birth to two months of age the baby self-attempts to coordinate many of the different experiences of its life into unified wholes, a process observed earlier as the "unity of the senses." From about two months of age to seven to nine months, the infant develops a core *self* that recognizes she is the source of her own actions, and that she continues to exist even when others leave the scene. This may be one reason why infants at this age experience such great excitement while playing peek-a-boo games with other people. Starting at around nine months of age, according to Stern, baby starts to develop a

subjective sense of self, where it dawns on her that she has her own world of experiences that are different from those of others. It's around this time that babies start looking back at their mothers after they've done something neat, wanting them to share the experience.

Finally, at around fifteen months, the infant develops a verbal self, and begins to understand that language can make the mutual interchange of wants, needs, feelings, and ideas far easier than the use of grunts, gestures, or even ESP. Baby discovers that there's a kind of magic and "muscle" in words. Simply by saying "Up!" for example, baby can effect miraculous changes in his outer environment, causing him to be brought up into the arms of a parent, and be fed, soothed, and loved.

At the same time, there's a distancing quality to the development of language that separates the infant from the vibrant perceptual immediacy of experience. Daniel Stern writes in his book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, "Suppose we are considering a child's perception of a patch of yellow sunlight on the wall. The infant will experience the intensity, warmth, shape, brightness, pleasure, and other amodal aspects of the patch. The fact that it is yellow light is not of primary or, for that matter, of any importance . . . [Then] Someone will enter the room and say, 'Oh, *look* at the *yellow* sun*light*!' Words in this case separate out precisely those properties that anchor the experience to a single modality of sensation. By binding it to words, they isolate the experience from the amodal flux in which it was originally experienced. Language can thus fracture amodal global experience. A discontinuity in experience is introduced."[27] The richness of the infant's perception, according to Stern, then begins to go underground, only to surface later on (if ever) as an artistic, contemplative, or emotional experience.[28]

THE JOURNEY OF THE INFANT HERO

What I believe we're seeing in the unfolding of the self in infancy is the start—or perhaps the continuation from the prenatal stage—of the "hero's journey" described so well by Joseph Campbell.[29] Against all odds, this tiny and vulnerable miniature-sized Odysseus marches through innumerable adventures only to (hopefully) become stronger and wiser for his deeds.[30] After emerging from the Cyclops's cave at birth, the hero-infant must now confront, integrate, and survive a pantheon of deities that are manifestations

of the different emotions, drives, intentions, aspirations, and unconscious wishes of the baby, the mother, and the other significant members of the infant's universe.

At one moment our baby Odysseus is shrieking out for supernatural help—perhaps from his guardian angel, Athena—to rescue him from starvation. At another moment, he's busy appeasing with winsome smiles and gurgles (the amulets of his trade) the dark and angry god Poseidon, Cyclops's father, who threatens him with annihilation. As he develops the powers of locomotion, he begins arduous travels across carpet-lands and encounters cavernous closets, abysmal stair-drops, and furniture-mountains on his pilgrimage to the holy Mount Olympus. And finally, he rises up above the flat plane of the earth, like a priest climbing an ancient ziggurat, and walks for the first time. No modern-day hero—no Neil Armstrong or Sir Edmund Hillary—can compete with the exhilaration that an infant must feel in ascending into the rarefied atmosphere where the Giants dwell as he takes his first steps on Planet Earth.

Perhaps baby's most astonishing accomplishment, though, is his ability to find the thread of his own being through all these ramblings, and to be able to establish the foundations for a stable relationship with the world, and in particular with the emotional lives of other people. As mentioned earlier, right from the start of life there is an integrative principle within the infant that Daniel Stern calls the "emergent self." This self seeks to order experiences and stabilize images of others, particularly those of his mother since her stability is so vital to his continued existence. It is probably a breakdown in this early self during the first few months of life that gives rise to the most serious forms of mental illnesses: the psychoses. In some psychotic disorders the separate experiences of mother—as Circe, Demeter, Athena, Scylla, Thoosa (Cyclops's mother), and the rest—aren't integrated into a whole image of a nurturing person who also has imperfections. The infant does not have a unified experience of what D. W. Winnicott calls "the good enough mother." Instead, some of the particularly horrific images of a mother or of other significant people remain un-integrated because of their potentially destructive impact, and they continue to have a life of their own. Such images may lie dormant for years, only to emerge in later life as auditory hallucinations, sudden violent behaviors, multiple personalities, manic-depressive episodes, or other forms of psychic disintegration or "possession." In this type of scenario, the hero-infant rages away at the

hydra-headed Scylla mother-monster and with each slash of his sword two more heads sprout up in their place. The child's own concept of self can fragment in a similar way.

The failure to integrate images of self and others, however, does not always predispose an infant to mental illness in later life. Episodes of fragmentation resulting from crises may have their own positive dimensions. Psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi observed in his clinical work the phenomenon of the "wise baby"—a healthy segment of the self that during trauma in early development disengages from the scene of the crime and attempts to heal the wounded part of the self. (It's interesting to note that the name "Odysseus" actually means "the son of pain.") Ferenczi writes in his *Selected Papers*: "It really seems as though, under the stress of imminent danger, part of the self splits off and becomes a psychic instance self-observing and desiring to help the self, and that possibly this happens in early—even the very earliest—childhood."[31] The early formation of an inner teacher self may be the basis in adult development for the "wounded healers" found in so many of the helping professions, and for the capacity of resilience that certain people possess in rising above extreme adversity in life.[32]

Such a phenomenon may be the psychic equivalent of the body's immune system coming to the rescue in dealing with danger. One theorist, psychologist Larry R. Vandervert, has suggested that the primitive image-schemas of infancy (those amodal "all-at-once" experiences described earlier) are actually sculpted from neural networks in the brain whose design evolved from circuits that enabled early vertebrates to survive in highly dynamic and dangerous environments.[33] It's possible, then, that the archetypes of infancy—the Athenas, Circes, Scyllas, Zeuses, Poseidons, and other transcendental beings—represent a kind of deep-structure mythological "world map" at a neurological level providing the infant-hero with a matrix of orientation and distinct markers to use in finding his way in the world. These markers allow the baby to recognize and avoid "predators" (e.g., aspects of the parents or others that are a threat to development) as well as to seek and join forces with the nurturers (e.g., healthy dimensions of parents or others) that are necessary for his survival.

Regardless of what Nature has provided in the way of help, the infant, like Odysseus, still must make critical choices in responding to life's events. The idea of a passive organism wired by evolution to respond to

circumstances in a fixed way negates the precious spark of divinity that may be attempting to shine its way out of the gloom into greater freedom and liberty. Even as Odysseus receives help from heavenly forces above, there burns within him a strong desire to return home to Ithaca. It is the same with the infant. Theologian Martin Buber writes: “He has stepped out of the glowing darkness of chaos into the cool light of creation. But he does not possess it yet; he must first draw it truly out, he must make it into a reality for himself, he must find his own world by seeing and hearing and touching and shaping it.”[34]

THE GIFT OF INFANCY: VITALITY

The world’s greatest energy source is not oil, gas, hydrogen, or nuclear power. It is infancy. Exhausted parents from around the world can testify to the fact that toddlers are greater bundles of power than any renewable energy source that science can deliver. The infant’s ability to orchestrate an emotional crescendo from the darkest agony to a brilliant ecstasy in only a few seconds rivals the acceleration rate of most high-performance automobiles. The disproportionately huge brain of a newborn has more blood flow and oxygen consumption than an adult’s brain. It’s said that toddlers are stronger in their leg muscles, on a pound-for-pound basis, than oxen. Truly, an infant represents the greatest expression of vitality that ever crawled across the face of the earth.

The infant still glows within us to the extent that we are truly *alive* in adulthood. To find out if this is the case, we need to ask ourselves: “How do I show my vitality?” If a clear answer comes to us, then we may be sure that we are still connected to this precious energy source. Our vitality expresses itself through many avenues: sports, hobbies, work, childrearing, relationships, lovemaking, social causes, and spiritual life, among others. At peak moments of involvement in any of these experiences, we feel invigorated by the world. If we aren’t clear about what is personally enlivening to us, then we need to inquire: “How can I *nurture* my vitality?” We may need to exercise, eat better, pay attention to our dream life, take up art, or seek counseling. Or, we may simply need to get off the beaten track and do something radically different to put pizzazz back into our otherwise

humdrum daily existence. However we decide to revitalize ourselves, we need to keep in mind that once long ago we were spirited two-year-old bundles of nonstop get-up-and-go, and deep within us there remains a spark of that infant vigor still yearning to dance ecstatically to the awesome rhythms of life.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT INFANCY

FOR YOURSELF

- Reconstruct what your relationship with your mother might have been like when you were an infant, using old photos, accounts from family and friends, recollections, and other sources. Then write a first-person narrative as if you were that infant living today.
- Give frequent hugs to family members and friends (with their permission, of course!) and schedule professional therapeutic massages to nourish your need to be touched.
- Listen to lullabies or other soothing music while rocking in a rocking chair or swinging in a hammock to simulate the feelings of being nurtured as an infant.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Provide information on the benefits and methods of breastfeeding for a family member or friend about to give birth whose preferences for postbirth feeding leans primarily toward infant formula.
- Volunteer to do out-of-the-house errands and chores for the mother of an infant to lighten her load.
- Encourage family members who have infants to restrict their access to computers, television, and other mass media (the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for kids under two years of age), and to use the time instead for free play with developmentally appropriate toys.

FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

- Financially support infant vaccination and oral rehydration programs in third world countries through organizations such as UNICEF or USAID.

- Volunteer at an infant learning program such as Early Head Start that provides home-based intervention for low-income families with infants.
- Adopt an infant or serve as a foster parent to an infant who has suffered from abuse and neglect, or physical and mental difficulties.

CHAPTER 4

Early Childhood

THE MAGICAL MYSTERY YEARS

In Mira's family a young girl of two or three years sang a tune and was saying to herself, "It is the tune I sang when I was a shepherdess in Greece," The memory of it was evoked at such an early age possibly by her fine psychic nature. It is not latent or precocious genius here, but memory.

—SRI AUROBINDO GHOSE[1]

The current Dalai Lama was only two years old in 1937 when followers of the previous Dalai Lama, who had died two years before, were led by dreams and visions to the boy's blue-roofed cottage in the small village of Taktsher in eastern Tibet. These disciples believed that their master had reincarnated somewhere in Tibet and they were looking for his successor. The search party members, traveling in disguise, were given lodging by the boy's family, who believed the travelers were simply itinerant pilgrims. During their visit, the child, named Lhamo Dhondrub, acted with great familiarity toward the head lama (priest) who was disguised as a servant. He went up to the monk and touched his prayer beads, asking to have them.

"I shall give them to you if you tell me who I am," said the monk.

"You are a lama from Sera," said the boy correctly. Then he began to chant, "Mani Mani," which was an abridged version of a mantra associated with the late Dalai Lama.[2] Seeking to test the boy, the monks placed several items that had belonged to the previous Dalai Lama in front of the child, including some prayer beads, a walking stick, and a miniature drum. Each item was accompanied by a cleverly duplicated fake. The child was then asked, successively, which of the two items he would like to have. In each

case, he chose the previous lama's possession, and ultimately convinced the monks that he was the latest incarnation of the Dalai Lama in Tibet.

This cultural recognition of a young child's ability to remember his origins in another lifetime is not limited to the Dalai Lama, nor even to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In the United States, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia, Ian Stevenson, has made it his life's work to interview children in localities as widespread as Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Europe, Burma, and Alaska who report having been some other personality during a previous lifetime. According to Dr. Stevenson: "A typical case of this type begins when a small child, usually between the ages of 2 and 4, starts to tell his parents, and anyone who will listen, that he remembers living another life before his birth . . . A child claiming to remember a previous life usually asks to be taken to the place where he says he lived during that life . . . If the child has furnished enough details . . . the search for the family of the person he has been talking about is nearly always successful . . . The child is then usually found to have been accurate in about 90 percent of the statements he has been making about the deceased person whose life he claims to remember."[3] Over the past forty years, Stevenson has investigated thousands of cases of this type and reported his findings in several scientific journals and in a number of meticulously researched books published by respected academic presses.[4]

In some cases, Dr. Stevenson traced unusual behavior patterns—such as a child's unexplained phobia—to events that occurred in the previous lifetime. Children who had a deep-seated fear of guns, for example, often reported having been killed in a past life by firearms. Even more remarkably, children who had birthmarks would frequently report having been killed in another lifetime in a manner consistent with the birthmark being a point of entry for the weapon. An Alaskan (Tlingit) child with a birthmark on his back, for example, said he had been killed during a fishing accident in a previous lifetime. When Dr. Stevenson investigated the individual reported to be that previous incarnation, it was discovered that he had been a fisherman who had in fact been speared and killed in that precise bodily location.[5] Stevenson indicates that children who remember past lives continue to make statements about their previous lives until about the age of six or seven, and then gradually cease referring to them. By the age of eight to ten, most of these children, as a result of adapting to the society around them, have completely forgotten their memories of other lives.[6]

Cases of this type represent a direct challenge to the rational scientific perspective of modern times, which regards the idea of reincarnation as a silly superstition or an exotic fantasy. If true, however, these cases reveal startling insights about the nature of early childhood. For here we see once again the child, like the infant, revealed as a deep *rememberer* of her origins. Unlike infants, however, by the age of two or three, children can now talk about their experiences. What seems remarkable about early childhood as a developmental period is that the child is still young enough to remember nonordinary states of consciousness, yet old enough to communicate with us about these memories through words or through other symbolic forms of representation such as drawing, singing, and playing. A few more years along, when the child has reached six or seven, the need to *adapt* to the social world around her (e.g., fitting in with peers, learning social norms, beginning to think rationally) will ultimately begin to crowd out these profound memories and experiences. For a few precious years, however, humanity seems to have a window on to a very magical and mystical part of its own deeper condition.

This capacity of young children to experience life at a fundamentally spiritual level has been recognized in most cultures, and in virtually every sacred tradition in recorded history.[7] Matthew 18:1–5, for example, says: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?' He called a child, set him in front of them, and said, 'I tell you this: Unless you turn round and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Let a man humble himself till he is like this child, and he will be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.'"[8]

In Islamic tradition, young children are said to understand the language of the angels, to hear the crying of the dead, to know remedies for sicknesses, and to confer *barakah* (blessing) on those they come into contact with.[9] In China during the Zhou dynasty (841–256 BCE), young children often acted as mediums through which ancestral spirits could be channeled at sacrificial rituals. The Confucian scholar Mencius wrote: "The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart."[10] During the Middle Ages in the kabbalistic or mystical traditions of Judaism, adepts carried out prophecy and divination activities by asking small children to stare into a crystal or mirror and describe what they saw there with their imagination.[11] In shamanic cultures, young children's innocent words are taken seriously

by holy men, as anthropologist Joan Halifax explains in *Shaman: The Wounded Healer* : “. . . he [Sila, a deity] has another means of (communication) by sunlight and calm of the sea, and little children innocently at play, themselves understanding nothing. Children hear a soft and gentle voice, almost like that of a woman. It comes to them in a mysterious way, but so gently that they are not afraid, they only hear that some danger threatens. And the children mention it (casually) when they come home, and it is then the business of the (shaman) to take such measures as shall guard against the danger.”[12]

In mythology, the image of the child shows up time and again as a figure of both great power and deep understanding. The Greek god Apollo killed a dragon in his youth, and his half brother Hermes invented the lyre from the shell of a tortoise when he was a young child. In the Finnish epic poem, *The Kalevala*, a child named Sampsa sows the land with trees, including an oak that rises to heaven and covers the moon and sun with its branches. Commenting on the archetype of the child, Carl Jung writes: “The ‘child’ is all that is abandoned and exposed and at the same time divinely powerful.”[13]

Western developmental psychology, unfortunately, does not support this kind of deep regard for the power and wisdom of childhood. On the contrary, early childhood researchers tend to evaluate the child in terms of what he *lacks* rather than what he possesses. Jean Piaget, the Swiss child development researcher, used the term *preoperational* to describe children’s thinking processes at this time of life, suggesting that the young child lacks the ability to use consistent logical operations in his musings about the world. Following Piaget, Harvard researcher Lawrence Kohlberg called young children’s moral reasoning *preconventional* because it failed to take into consideration such factors as fair play, intentionality, and internal motivation. As we noted earlier, Freud and many of his followers tended to regard the young child as an egotist, continually projecting his selfish little fantasies on to the world around him. In each of these cases, the life of the young child is measured against later stages of development and found to come up short. What these mainstream *adapter* models of early childhood fail to grasp is that this stage of development is not simply a “pre-” stage characterized by deficiency and immaturity, but a unique period of life with its own rich phenomenology of images, feelings, perceptions, and beliefs.

VARIETIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

The whole world is *alive* in early childhood. Dreams can be as real as waking experiences. One of the best ways, in fact, to recapture the feelings and perceptions of this time of life is to pay attention to your own dreams, which don't obey the rules of conventional waking reality. Young children experience so-called inanimate objects like stones, clouds, rivers, and toys as full of life, purpose, and meaning. I remember as a six-year-old, for example, seeing stones leaning awkwardly against a tree, and laying them down on the ground so that they could be more "comfortable." Young children don't separate feelings from perceptions and action: They all happen at the same time.

Pioneer developmental psychologist Heinz Werner referred to this sort of experience as *physiognomic perception.* In his book *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development,* he made a distinction between the normal perception of adulthood, where a landscape, for example, is viewed according to its geometrical technical matter-of-fact qualities, and the physiognomic perceptions of childhood, where the same landscape will be seen as expressing a certain kind of emotional quality: happy, sad, sinister, and so forth. Werner noted that this kind of perception could be found not only in young children, but also among creative individuals and members of indigenous cultures.

The experience of watching a dramatic film provides a good metaphor for what these kinds of perceptions in early childhood are like. For the young child, the entirety of life is an ongoing, highly gripping movie with an Oscar caliber soundtrack. Werner provides many delightful examples of this: One two-year-old boy, upon seeing a cup lying on its side, replied: "Poor, tired cup!" The parents later reported: "Today we found our boy in the twilight of the bedroom, sitting up in his bed, his eyes staring fixedly at the stove: 'Look, the stove is making *bah* . . . he's sticking out his tongue!'" A four-year-old girl, seeing some cards on which angular figures were drawn, cried out: "Ugh! What a lot of prickles and thorns!" And she hesitated to pick up the cards lest the thorns stick into her fingers. A five-and-a-half-year-old girl walking with her mother in the rain when light was fading said: "I can't see a thing, it's so foggy. Everything is like whispering!"[14]

This easy flow of perceptions into feelings and feelings into sensations seems to be a carryover of the infant's unity of the senses described in the last chapter. When you were a young child, your senses were beginning to split off into touch, taste, smell, vision, and hearing, but they still frequently fused together in experiences of *synaesthesia.* You might have associated musical tones with different colors, tasted shapes, gotten tactile sensations from certain smells, or even seen sounds.[15] In addition, your experience of each particular sense was likely to have been far more vivid than it is in adulthood, undiluted as it was by the verbal mind chatter of maturity. Colors were deeper, sounds were richer, smells were more fragrant, and your imagination was very probably more highly developed. Research suggests that many young children possess a capacity known as *eidetic imagery*: They see images in their mind's eye that are as clear as outer perceptions are to the rest of us.[16] As one child told nineteenth-century writer Thomas De Quincey about the phantoms that he saw in the dark: "I can tell them to go, and they go; but sometimes they come, when I don't tell them to come."[17] I remember seeing people's faces looking down at me when I was in my crib as a young child, which didn't go away when I closed my eyes. For some reason, I called this phenomenon "the Leland" (my middle name is "Leigh," so perhaps that's why). I also remember making "imprints" of images in my mind (like an imaginary car or house) on the inside of my eyelids. These images were so clear that they would linger for a time with the clarity of an afterimage of something that I'd seen in the outer world.

The fact that children produce such clear imagery in early development is one of the reasons why their nightmares can be so terrifying. They literally can't tell the difference between what they've seen in their dream images and what they experience with their eyes open. Gary Larson humorously depicts this situation in one of his *Far Side* cartoons. A mother comes into her son's bedroom where the boy cowers under the covers showing only his terrified eyes. The mother exclaims: "Now Billy, how can you tell me there's a monster in this room when you can't even describe his *face* to me!" And in the corner, we can see a monster standing there with a bag over his head! From a strictly phenomenological point of view, monsters, fairies, elves, angels, and other fantastic creatures are quite real in early childhood, especially in these nighttime encounters, when the child might see visions of monsters that would stand Odysseus's hair on end.

As we noted earlier, these exceptional states of consciousness tend to gradually fade away as the child grows into middle childhood and is forced to adapt to the more rational world around him.[18] However, some people continue to hold on to these modes of perception into adulthood and use them in constructive ways. These are the artists, inventors, and visionaries who use such capacities to create works of art, make scientific discoveries, or develop other groundbreaking projects that transform the world around us. Nikola Tesla, the inventor of the Tesla coil and the alternating-current generator, used eidetic imagery to design many of his machines. He wrote in his autobiography: "When I get an idea, I start at once building it up in my imagination. I change the construction, make improvements and operate the device in my mind. It is absolutely immaterial to me whether I run my turbine in thought or test it in my shop."[19]

Composers like Alexander Scriabin and Olivier Messiaen used synaesthesia to create musical pieces that combined tone and color, as did Isaac Newton when he linked his theory of the color spectrum to the seven-toned intervals of the musical scale. Physiognomic or "feeling-toned" perceptions also interpenetrate the work of most painters and sculptors. The artist Marc Chagall once advised a young artist: "The older you grow, the less spontaneous you will be. A child paints with passionate intensity; that's the quality you must preserve."[20] After visiting an exhibition of children's art in 1956, Pablo Picasso was reported to have said: "When I was their age I could draw like Raphael, but it took me a lifetime to learn to draw like them."[21]

Young children not only perceive the world differently from the rest of us, they also *think* about the world in quite a distinct way. Their thoughts are somehow bigger, broader, more global and dynamic, and less systematic or rational than older kids or adults. This isn't to say that their ideas aren't rational, but they possess a different kind of logic than that used in adulthood; a rationality that as we noted earlier may be more akin to the logic of dreams and fantasies than waking life. Even though Jean Piaget characterized the years of early childhood in terms of what it lacked, in his earliest work, he seemed to be alive to the magic of the young child's thinking processes, and recorded his observations in rich detail.[22] For example, Piaget watched a three-year-old, after scratching herself on a wall, look at her hand and exclaim: "Who made that mark? . . . It hurts where the wall hit me."[23] In this instance, the child reversed adult cause and effect and

viewed a so-called inert object as an active agent in her own fate. Similarly, Piaget wrote about a four-year-old who looked at the moon and said, “There’s the moon; it’s round,” and then, when a cloud hid the moon, observed: “Look now, it’s been killed.”[24] Instead of thinking of the cloud as simply being superimposed over the moon, the child held a concept of the cloud as a destroyer.

This type of thinking seems very much like the mythological thinking of ancient peoples, who regarded solar eclipses, for example, as gods being destroyed by serpents or evil spirits. In the ancient Indian epic poem *The Mahabharata*, for example, there is a passage that illustrates this kind of effect regarding an eclipse:

> “There is a cowherd who predicts that tonight the round silver moon will be swallowed up.”
>
> “Forever?” asked the king anxiously.
>
> “No. Rahu the demon will swallow the Lord of the Lotus, but because Rahu has only a head and no body . . .”
>
> “Ah! Of course, I remember,” said the king. “The moon will come out his neck—I know. I am well educated. I studied all the natural sciences as a boy.”[25]

It’s interesting to consider how our own personal concepts of *moon*, *sun*, *tree*, *apple*, *chair,* and other objects and ideas that we take for granted in adulthood originally developed out of mythological or fanciful notions such as these. I remember as a child picking up the receiver of a telephone, hearing the ongoing hum of the signal, and thinking that I was listening to the voice of God. It scared me. I also used to think that there were little men in soda machines who dispensed the drinks. You may recall similarly fantastic notions that you held about how the world worked when you were a child. It’s as if each concept that we hold in our mind as adults has its own unique autobiography that can be traced back through time into dimmer, hazier regions of our subconscious during early childhood when our thinking took on these mythic or archetypal forms. The young child’s thinking processes also seem to link up in an undifferentiated way with moral concerns. Heinz Werner observed that young children appear to fuse ethical ideals with aesthetic judgments. A two-and-a-half-year-old, cited by Werner, for example, called a towel hook “a cruel thing,” and at the age of

three-and-a-half thought that the number 5 looked “mean” while the number 4 looked “soft.” These early judgments are not entirely unlike the aesthetics of those individuals and groups who view cultural forms, such as architecture, as reflections of a deeper moral order.[26]

The experiences of young children often include a deeply transpersonal dimension as well. Many of these, especially those that occur in the context of nature, have a *numinous* quality. In a study conducted at Manchester College in Oxford, England, a fifty-two-year-old woman remembering back to childhood reported:

> “The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young—between four and five years old . . . My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land . . . known locally as ‘the moors.’ As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground . . . Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells [flowers], appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded. Appearing here and there was a shining focus of energy in that more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong and utterly good and beneficent. The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good.”[27]

Sometimes these deeper transpersonal intuitions come in the form of dreams. One young girl in psychoanalysis, for example, had a dream of being on the seashore: “I was on a beach with my nurse, only she wasn’t there. A big wave came in and I ran away. When I came back, there were lots and lots of things on the beach and lots and lots of starfish, but one starfish was a *blue* starfish and he had an eye right in the middle of him, and he looked at me and he knew me, me-myself, I mean, and he was my starfish because he knew me-myself. So I took him home. And then I woke up.”[28] The blue starfish, an embodiment of life’s wholeness, saw not the small “me”—the *adapter* me of the girl, but rather, “me-myself,” that is, her

rememberer me, her real Self. The fact that she took the starfish home suggests that she had at least partially integrated this deeper aspect of herself into her daily life.

Young children's spiritual experiences sometimes serve as healing factors that help them cope with traumatic events. Surveys of adult women who have survived childhood violence reveal that many of them used spirituality or even out-of-body experiences to escape from the terror of physical abuse as children.[29] In one of my own child development classes, a fifty-year-old woman recorded in her class journal a spiritual experience that happened when she was five years old. Her mother had physically abused her since she was three, and one winter day she was thrown out of the house to fend for herself in the ice and snow. Just as she thought she might freeze to death, an angel appeared to her who told her she would not turn out to be evil as her mother had predicted but would grow up to become a kind, loving, gentle person with a pleasant voice and a soft touch, and that she would be able to help troubled people. As the angel left her, the girl remembered repeating to herself over and over again: "I'm five years old and it's 1939 and I will remember this forever . . . I'm five years old and it's 1939 and I will remember this forever . . ." And she did remember. In her adult life, she drew upon this image as she trained to be a psychotherapist to help others. It seems that in cases of this kind, the *rememberer* side of an individual (embodied here in the guardian angel) comes to the fore when the *adapter* side is blocked from advancing in life. This may be Sandor Ferenczi's "wise baby," whom we referred to in the last chapter, growing up and helping to ward off attacks to the soul's integrity. It is also very much like the goddess Athena coming down from Mount Olympus to help Odysseus out of his difficulties during his quest to get back home to Ithaca.

PLAY IS THE THING

In the phenomena related above, the child appears to transgress the usual divisions made in adulthood between self and world, inside and outside, reality and fantasy, and subject and object. Western psychologists, as well as many of the rest of us, tend to regard this tendency of the child to fuse opposites as examples of "confused" thinking. And yet the child is not necessarily confused, and may be much more confused by an adult's

attempts to impose a more rational perspective on him. On the contrary, the young child is quite often crystal clear in what he sees, feels, perceives, and otherwise experiences. What is unique about this stage of development is that the child lives life neither in the world of fantasy nor in the world of adult reality, but in the nexus between the two. Rational adults regard the so-called "magical thinking" of early childhood in terms of what it isn't (e.g., efficacy in the adult world), rather than looking at what it really *is*: the child's ability to create something new that is just coming into existence. And nowhere else is this seen more clearly than in the child's experience of play.

Nearly everybody agrees that play is good for young children. According to early childhood research, play develops social skills, increases cognitive functioning, stimulates creativity, and improves a host of other laudable and socially valued skills.[30] However, young children's play is something far more profound than an activity to help kids better adapt to the world around them. Play is as much about *remembering* as it is about *adapting*. Play is the critical factor not only in the development of individuals, but also in the creation of civilizations. When children play, they take what is merely *possible* from their inner worlds and make it *actual* by borrowing from the outer world, the materials, roles, and situations that they see around them.

During this transaction, as we've noted above, the young child exists in an "in-between" state that is neither fantasy nor reality. Child psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott writes in his book *Playing and Reality* about the child's "play space": "This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world. Into this play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream potential and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality."[31] Within this space, the young child is totally focused upon the play experience and enters a state of absorption that psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow": a type of concentration similar to meditation that he has also observed in brain surgeons at work in the operating room and in rock climbers moving up mountain walls.[32]

In the midst of this sacred space, the playing child serves as a kind of broker for innovation. In Ghana, groups of young children have gathered together and spontaneously created a new dance style called *Atikatika* that serves as a kind of political critique of their society. As one elder observed: "If you want to see our way of life, you will see it from the children."[33] In colonial Hawaii, young children playing together from different linguistic groups collectively created new Creole languages based upon the different dialects they heard around them. These languages, according to one linguist, exhibited "the complexity, nuance, and expressive power universally found in the more established languages of the world."[34]

In our early play experiences, we entered another universe, and either alone or with a group of others created a set of rules, scenarios, and realities that were unlike anything found in our interactions with adults. I remember living entire lifetimes with kids during play sessions that were spontaneous happenings extending through a whole day and into the early evening hours. I was married two or three times, divorced once, went through initiation ceremonies, took part in impromptu parades, concerts, and contests, dug for oil, explored the boundaries of the known world (a few blocks from my house), fought invisible enemies, and was rescued from danger by cats. And I was only five years old! When children enter the play space, they enter a magical zone of creation where spontaneous activities take on a life of their own, a life that vanishes like fairy dust at the sound of a parent's call in the distance: "Come home! It's time for dinner!" This cry signifies the end of play and the reentrance of the child into the conventional world of daily life. These play experiences are echoes of deeper creative forces working at the heart of culture. Johan Huizinga, author of *Homo Ludens* (Man, the Player), suggests that playfulness "as a social impulse [is] older than culture itself . . . Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play . . . We have to conclude that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played."[35]

This deeper dimension of play also can be seen working in the lives of creative individuals who have given birth to their ideas and inventions. By their own admission, many of their creative activities are indistinguishable from the playful acts of young children. Isaac Newton once wrote: "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea shore and diverting himself and then

finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary while the greater ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."[36] Nuclear physicist and father of the atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, once said: "There are children playing on the streets who could solve some of my top physics problems, because they have modes of perception I lost long ago."[37] Frank Lloyd Wright traced his own architectural career back to his earliest play experiences with simple wooden blocks.[38] Alexander Fleming, the Scottish bacteriologist who discovered penicillin, said: "I play with microbes. It is very pleasant to break the rules."[39] It may be that most, if not all, of the greatest accomplishments of culture, though shaped and articulated through plenty of hard work and extraordinary skill, had their original spark from something playful in the mind, body, or spirit of these individuals.[40]

Given the monumental importance of young children's play, it is quite disturbing to realize that play is undergoing a profound deterioration in contemporary society. According to New Zealand play expert Brian Sutton-Smith, the typical image of a child at play in our time is of a solitary child in front of a television set (or perhaps now, a tablet or smartphone) playing with his action toys.[41] These toys leave little for the imagination. Some of these "play" figures come with their own manufacturer-devised personality profiles. Video games and computer time, sanctioned by child experts at earlier and earlier ages these days, threaten to overwhelm even these truncated play experiences. In addition, competitive games and sports, like soccer, hockey, and basketball, have largely replaced the kind of free unstructured play where kids create their own rules.

The danger in all of this is that these more organized, conventionalized, and prefabricated pastimes threaten to sever the crucial connection that real play makes between fantasy and reality, so that young children can no longer mix the rich contents of their own imagination—their dream potential—with self-selected components of the external world. Instead, the time normally devoted to play is now almost totally saturated with externally imposed fragments of the real world: images from market-driven toy and video game designers, scenarios from mediocre television and movie screenwriters, and game rules and regulations from high-stress coaches and achievement-driven parents.[42] In such an environment, civilization itself could be lost without our even noticing it.

THE SPARKLING BRAIN OF A THREE-YEAR-OLD

The amazing work that young children do when they play—that is, when they create new realities—is mirrored in the awesome processes going on inside of their brains. Brain researcher Marian Diamond writes that: ". . . the energy use in a two-year-old [brain] is equal to an adult's. And then, *the levels keep right on rising* until, by age three, the child's brain is *twice* as active as an adult's. This metaphoric crackling, bristling, sparkling, and glowing of brain cells remains at double the adult rate until about age nine or ten; at that time, metabolism begins dropping and reaches adult levels by age eighteen."[43] During this time, the young child has an abundance of dendrites (connections between neurons) undergoing a process of "pruning," where neuronal connections are kept or discarded depending upon what kind of stimulation the child receives from the environment.[44] I'd like to suggest that this neurological richness in the young child represents a biological index of her "human potential." This neural symphony may be the biological manifestation of the kinds of experiences we've been looking at in this chapter: children's memories of other lifetimes, synaesthesia, eidetic imagery, physiognomic perception, spiritual and creative insight, spontaneity, curiosity, wonder, playfulness, humor, and other ordinary and nonordinary states of consciousness.

I believe Nature provides this high level of brain metabolism and wealth of brain connections during early childhood so that young children may offer to the culture an opportunity to transform, renew, and refresh itself out of this neurological fountain of possibilities.[45] As noted earlier, one of the most consistent findings in the neuropsychology of human development is that environmental stimulation creates new dendrites, which are those parts of a neuron or brain cell that receive information from surrounding cells. Culture is critical in determining which brain connections are retained throughout life and which are lost.

No culture can say yes to all of the young child's possibilities—at least no culture that we yet know about.[46] But cultures make choices about which brain connections they wish to strengthen, stimulate, and maintain, and which they wish to weaken, ignore, and eliminate. This is how cultures essentially develop: by making choices in what to say yes to and what to say no to regarding their younger citizens' neurological possibilities. In the case of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan culture said yes to the part of his brain that

as a child enthusiastically responded to the behaviors and artifacts of the previous Dalai Lama. The case of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is also instructive. His composer father, Leopold, said yes to Wolfgang's musical brain by sacrificing his own career as a musician to further his son's development as a composer and performer. In addition, eighteenth-century European culture said yes to Mozart's neurological possibilities in music by sacrificing to play at its imperial courts. Had the Dalai Lama been born in B. F. Skinner's behaviorist household, or had Mozart been born to tone-deaf parents in Puritan England, where musical creativity was largely suppressed, then it is unlikely that their spiritual or musical potentials would have been integrated into their respective cultures.

These scenarios point out just how fragile the process is through which a young child's potentials come into being. A child can be born with the possibility to become a scientist, an artist, a musician, a business leader, an actor, a doctor, a humanitarian, or any of a thousand other life-enhancing roles, and all it takes is the repressiveness of one or more all-powerful adults to stomp those dreams into the dust. As Maria Montessori put it: "The child is like a soul in a dark dungeon striving to come out into the light . . . And, all the while, there is standing by a gigantic being of enormous power waiting to pounce upon it and crush it."[47]

Sometimes, the acts that destroy these creative possibilities are brutal and overt, as when children are physically beaten or sexually abused. In 2016, according to data provided by state Child Protective Services, an estimated 676,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect nationwide.[48] As the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky pointed out in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, ". . . it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only. To all other types of humanity these torturers behave mildly and benevolently, like cultivated and humane Europeans; but they are very fond of tormenting children, even fond of children themselves in that sense. It's just their defenselessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal, that sets his vile blood on fire."[49]

More often children are tortured through subtler psychological means. Psychoanalyst Alice Miller describes how adults abuse children emotionally by demanding that they respond to the adults' own unresolved feelings, rather than allowing kids to express freely their authentic selves. She writes: "What child has never been laughed at for his fears [by an

adult] and been told, ‘You don’t need to be afraid of a thing like that.’ And what child will then not feel shamed and despised because he could not assess the danger correctly. . . . Such experiences come in all shades and varieties. Common to them all is the sense of strength that it gives the adult to face the weak and helpless child’s fear and to have the possibility of controlling fear in another person, while he cannot control his own.”[50]

There are perhaps a wide variety of scenarios that play out this basic theme. Adults who shame children for being playful and dramatic at a social event because they show up the adults and make them feel inadequate. Parents who won’t let their kids express themselves musically or artistically because they, the parents, never could do those things. Parents who scorn their children for being lazy, when it is the parent who is a sloth. Parents who push their children into intellectual achievements before they’re ready, so that they will look like “superparents” to their relatives and friends. These are only a few of the numberless “soul murders” that take place quietly, secretly, on a daily basis in some of our finest and most decent homes.

A SOAP OPERA WORLD

Much of what young children see and experience in their daily lives is inaccessible to the average adult because it encompasses emotional, subverbal, and subconscious dimensions of awareness that most adults censored out of their awareness long ago. In her book *The Inner World of Childhood*, psychoanalyst Frances Wickes wrote: “Children gather from us the atmosphere of all that we most carefully ignore in ourselves.”[51] This may help explain why so many child reports of adult abuse are deemed “false memories” in legal proceedings. The abuse may not be recorded in adult reality but it may truly exist inside of the child’s own fragile and perceptive psyche. Young children see the sneer behind the adult smile. They hear the wounded cry within the adult laugh. They witness the pain behind the proud action. As one child psychiatrist told me: “Young children see not only who you are, but who you *could* have been.” They perceive at an emotional level the unfulfilled expectations, the abandoned hopes, and the haunted aspirations of the adults around them.

This makes much of their experience growing up among family members and close friends and acquaintances quite similar to that of a soap

opera. Freud was quite right to point out the importance of the “love romance” between the young child and his parents in his discussion of the Oedipus complex. But he, or at least many of his followers, oversimplified and stereotyped what is a far more complex process. Boys don’t just want to kill their fathers and sleep with their mothers. They could also want to do the reverse, especially if they are gay.[52] They might even want to sleep with their sisters or their babysitters or their nursemaids. Freud himself suggested that his nurse had indoctrinated him into sexual matters at an early age.[53] Similarly, girls may wish to kill their fathers (especially if the fathers have been molesting them) and marry their mothers or grandmothers, or cuddle forever with their best friends. Out of this nest of intrigue there can emerge feelings of jealousy, anger, lust, and hurt to rival the greatest tragedies of Shakespearean and Greek drama. Freud shouldn’t have limited himself to only one or two of these plays.

But Freud was correct when he declared that young children respond to the people around them with intense emotion. He is still far ahead of his time in declaring that children are highly sexual beings. His pronouncements shocked Victorian society, but he is still largely misunderstood by a modern culture that officially regards children as “cute” and “innocent” even as it mercilessly exploits their sexuality in advertisements, beauty contests, rock videos, and pornography. The natural and spontaneous sex play of children is an everyday occurrence in households across America. In one recent survey, parents reported that 48 percent of children between the ages of three and six were observed engaging in interactive sex play.[54] And as Freud even more provocatively pointed out, they obtain their sexual pleasure from all over their bodies, especially from the mouth, anus, and genital organs. This sexuality, like so much of the young child’s world, is not cut off from the rest of his life, but fuses with spiritual feeling, aesthetic moods, creative aspirations, aggressive impulses, and passionate love.

Our first experiences of falling deeply in love with someone (a parent, a sibling, a playmate) most probably occurred during these years from two to seven. One study suggested that passionate love is as common in early childhood as it is in adolescence.[55] As some of the nation’s leading child development researchers have pointed out, “Three-year-olds do act like lovers toward their parents. In fact, they act like lovers out of Italian opera, with passionate and sensual embraces and equally passionate despair at

separation and jealousy of rivals."[56] These experiences of falling in love with a parent or another person during early childhood, and then being betrayed and feeling the loss of love and the anguish and heartache of rejection, represent some of the most deeply painful moments of our lives. Often these events leave emotional wounds that continue to plague our most intimate relationships in adulthood.

Moreover, because a young child is so incredibly sensitive to the moods and feelings of people in his personal world, he carries around the equivalent of a mood radar detection system, picking up on the emotions of those around him, amplifying those feelings to a screechingly high pitch, and all the while not knowing exactly where the signal is coming from.[57] Add to this the range of other phenomena described earlier in this chapter and you can begin to understand the emotional roller coaster nature of early childhood. As adults, we experience an event and immediately classify it into some convenient category to make it emotionally manageable. For the young child, however, each event is encountered in its raw immediacy. It might be a *Tristan and Isolde* throb of unrequited love, an archetypal image of a golden sun left over from a morning dream, or, more dangerously, a dagger of anger shot in his direction from an out-of-control caregiver.

DEFENDING THEIR YOUNG LIVES

Such exquisite vulnerability requires some form of modulation and protection so that the child is not totally overwhelmed by a sea of subconscious material. In many cases, the efforts that the child goes through to accomplish this task serves only to cripple him in taking on the challenges of life. For here is the time of life when young children learn to stiffen their bodies, stifle their breathing, and develop what Wilhelm Reich called "body armor," a defensive shield that protects a person from painful feelings but also prevents them from experiencing any deep emotions whatsoever.[58] At this time, also, the child learns how to ward off unpleasantness through denial, a defense that will become a fine art later on in adulthood when practiced by politicians, sociopaths, and cheating spouses. Finally, and perhaps most devastatingly, it is at this time that children learn to give themselves away. They learn to sacrifice their own authentic selves in order to keep those they care about most from abandoning them. Feeling that there is no other way of averting psychic

disaster, a child will adopt a mask or an “as-if personality” offered to him by a parent or guardian who demands conformity to a narrow set of behaviors even though it means the sacrifice of the child’s very self.

At the same time, however, there is the hero ego, our little Odysseus, who very often rises to the challenge with a wide range of useful self-regulation strategies to make both the inner and the outer world more bearable (in the epic poem *The Iliad*, Homer often referred to Odysseus as “the great tactician” in his ability to strategically cope with the dangers of war). Of paramount importance is the child’s emerging use of language to articulate the invisible, contain the inscrutable, and master the unknowable. It’s at this time of life, for example, that we see the emergence of a wide range of bedtime rituals involving magical incantations to ward off the demons of the night. Heinz Werner reports how one four-year-old said every evening without exception the following phrase: “Goodnight, sleep well, sweet dreams, about a sour pickle again. Mother, you must buy me another sour pickle.” In another case, two girls made up a complicated bedtime ritual that concluded with the word *bogosho*, which meant “good night.” After this final word, the children allowed nothing more to be said, failing which the entire ceremony had to be totally repeated.[59]

Similarly, the child’s ability to form mental images—and to represent these images in drawings, artwork, and symbolic play—serves as a tool to ward off inner beasts, deal with painful feelings, and gain a sense of control over life’s tumults. Through creative expression, we could torment or kill off our enemies in early childhood and get relief from the feelings of humiliation we experienced as young children. We could create romantic fantasies or revenge fantasies about people we passionately loved who did not love us in return. We could represent through art and play the monsters we feared, the people we cared about, and the situations that made us angry or fearful, thus rendering them, if not harmless, then at least bearable. Some of my own drawings at five and six are representations of radios and electronic consoles with scores of buttons on them, as if I was trying to control the inner anxieties that afflicted me as I saw my father slipping into a clinical depression that would devastate my emotional life over the next decade.

These types of adaptive coping skills are probably the psychological equivalent of the maturation that is taking place inside the brain as nerve pathways develop myelin sheaths in early childhood. This biological

process is, in fact, an apt metaphor for describing what goes on in the child's emotional life at this time. In myelination the raw nerves in the brain are insulated, thus allowing for the orderly passage of electrical impulses throughout the nervous system. In like manner, young children, with the help of trustworthy adults, learn how to insulate themselves from much of the *Sturm und Drang* of the psychic underworld so that they can adjust themselves to the broader social world of which they are becoming an increasingly integral part. In middle childhood, which is the topic of our next chapter, the growing child, even as she leaves a rich world of magical adventures and mysterious encounters behind, discovers a whole new set of powers and possibilities awaiting her.

THE GIFT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD: PLAYFULNESS

Whenever you see children engaged in spontaneous open-ended play, you're seeing a miracle at work. Some scientists believe that the frontal lobes of the brain evolved as a result of millions of years of play behavior.[60] As we've noted in this chapter, when children play, they bring together fantasy and reality to create something that is neither of these things but is instead a fusion of possibility and practicality. In spontaneous play, children enter a sacred space where anything can happen. Play is the crucible out of which all vibrant new behaviors and understandings emerge. Play is the deep inner well of creativity that enlivens the calcified world of convention and routine.

There is much we can learn in adulthood from the playfulness of young children. We can learn, for example, not to take ourselves so seriously. When locked in a dispute with a spouse or colleague, play teaches us how to crack a smile, put on a funny voice, or make a strange face just to melt the tension away. Play can also help us avoid getting stuck in petrified ways of thinking and behaving. Dramatic improvisation around a key problem can bring new ideas into a team meeting at work. A spontaneous game of "find the blue food" can turn a boring family dinner into a happy and engaging meal. There is good reason why virtually every creative adult in history has shown some element of play in their work and life. From Shakespeare's bawdy puns to Alexander Fleming's growing of ballerina-shaped bacteria in petri dishes, creative individuals have known that life is

just too amazing not to be fun. So they play in order to keep that wonder alive. Let us take our cue from young children, and from those adult geniuses who have held on to their wonder-filled child selves. By allowing spontaneous play into our lives, who knows what incredible things can happen!

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD

FOR YOURSELF

- Get out some crayons, finger paint, or clay and have fun drawing, painting, or modeling in a space where you can make a mess and feel like a creative child again.
- Keep a record of your dreams (especially those that take you back to early childhood experiences). Reflect on how the logic of dreams mirrors the logic of early childhood.
- Write down any experiences you remember from early childhood that were “nonordinary” (religious, spiritual, psychic, archetypal), and share them with friends who have gone through the same process.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Regularly engage in free play with your own children, or with children of friends or family who may not otherwise have many opportunities to play.
- Limit the amount of time your young children spend with mass media. Eliminate as much as possible your child’s exposure to violent programming. Encourage other families to do the same.
- Provide toys for your own children or those of family and friends that are developmentally appropriate (open-ended, creative, nonviolent).

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Volunteer at a child protective day care center that provides shelter for children who have been abused or neglected at home.
- Support developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs in your community that emphasize play rather than academic achievement.
- Give financially to an organization that supports the healthy development of young children, such as the Association for Childhood

Education International or the Alliance for Childhood.

CHAPTER 5

Middle Childhood

ENTERING THE CIVILIZED WORLD

In the summer of my sixth year a great expectation rose within me; something overwhelming was pending. I was up each morning at dawn, rushed to the top of Dorchester Hill, a treeless knoll of grass and boulders, to await the sun, my heart pounding. A kind of numinous expectancy loomed everywhere about and within me . . . an awesome new dimension of life was ready to unfold. Instead, I was put in school that fall . . . All year I sat at that desk, stunned, wondering at such a fate, thinking over and over: something was supposed to happen, and it wasn't this.

—JOSEPH CHILTON PEARCE[1]

It all began quite by chance. The Reverend Patrick Brontë was visiting Leeds, England, in June 1826 and brought back a gift of twelve wooden soldiers for his nine-year-old son, Branwell, to replace some older ones that had been broken. The boy and his sisters, already used to making up little plays, began to weave fanciful stories around the toy soldiers, inventing the name "The Young Men" for them. The four children, led by the two oldest siblings, Branwell and Charlotte, transformed the inert wooden figures into a band of young adventurers. In their imagination, the children sent the soldiers off to Africa to found a colony they named "Glass Town." This community eventually grew into a completely self-contained world peopled by descendants of the twelve soldiers. This miniature society in turn gave birth to the worlds of Angria, fashioned by Charlotte and Branwell, and

Gondal, led by Emily and Anne. In the course of creating their worlds, the children wrote plays and stories, edited tiny magazines with jokes, puns, news, and gossip, drew maps and charts of the terrain, and developed systems of government and even a special language for the inhabitants.[2] Some of the verve and vitality of these worlds would later show up in the novels of the three girls, including Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.[3]

Inspired by the story of the Brontë children and by his own childhood fantasy of a world that he called the New Hentian States, BBC executive Robert Silvey asked readers of several British periodicals in 1977 to write about their own imaginary worlds in childhood. He received numerous replies and ultimately teamed up with a retired psychiatrist to write a study of sixty-four imaginary worlds or *paracosms*.[4] This term was coined by Silvey to describe meaningful private worlds of childhood that endure for some months or years, that are not confused with outer reality, and that matter a great deal to their creators. One paracosm in their study was a country called Branmail consisting totally of cats—except for its creator, a six-year-old girl named Holly who had access to the world by scaling a height called Bumpety Banks. Another paracosm was the island nation of Dobid created by a ten-year-old future artist who drew maps and wrote historic documents on vellum in an ancient Dobidian language. A third example was a shared world of two sisters aged five and nine that began as a continuous bedtime story and lasted for about three years. It was a matriarchal community called Mrs-es where all the husbands were "puppet figures."

Such imaginative worlds tell us a lot about life during the middle childhood years. They reveal, for example, the child's awareness of a more complex social world out there that is being internalized and acted out in fantasy play. They also tell us that children now *have* an imagination. In early childhood, as we saw in the last chapter, inner images and outer perceptions were often fused together in an undifferentiated whole. The entire waking world had a dreamlike quality to it and nighttime phantoms could assume daylike clarity. In middle childhood, however, this magical world disappears as the child's own maturing cognition divides fantasy from reality. Over the course of middle childhood, the internal world of the imagination becomes a private space where children experiment with their

understandings of how the world works, and where they explore the depths of their own increasingly sophisticated cognitive, emotional, social, and creative lives. Early childhood perceptions and experiences that are not considered to be objective reality by the culture (e.g., fairies, elves, witches, dragons, monsters, and angels) essentially "go underground" at this time and assume new identities, now as imaginative beings rather than as supernatural entities.[5] The external world gradually assumes for children in the middle years the geometric and logical proportions considered to be the "consensual reality" of most adult members of their culture.

THE FIVE TO SEVEN SHIFT

Cultures have long recognized that something special happens to children somewhere between the ages of five and seven. In Burma, starting at about age five, young boys are permitted to take part in the *ShinByu* initiation ceremony where they have their heads shaved and enter a Buddhist monastery. In Turkey, authorities don't circumcise boys until around age seven, believing that only at this age are they capable of comprehending its significance. Roman Catholics regard seven as the age when children start to become morally responsible for their acts and are capable of committing cardinal sins. The Jesuits are famous for saying: "Give me the child until he is seven and I will show you the man." In most nonliterate cultures around the world, children begin taking on adult responsibilities somewhere between five and seven years of age: They start to care for younger children, harvest grain, sew, spin, and hunt. Anthropologist Thomas Buckley, writing about a child in nineteenth-century Yurok culture in northwestern California, noted: "[He] learned very early to observe the men of his village carefully. After a while, using his toy bow, he killed a bird with valuable feathers. He made a small wooden storage box, as he'd seen done, put the feathers in this, and showed the men. One of them made him a real hunting bow, a small and light one, and from then on he was free to join hunting parties, with all of the rights and responsibilities of a hunter. He had done what a man does and, in this respect, was treated like a man. He was six at the time."[6]

This cultural recognition that children between the ages of five and seven are capable of greater responsibility and independence seems to have its roots in a new kind of thinking that takes place during this time.

According to the pioneering work of Swiss epistemologist Jean Piaget, the child goes through a qualitative shift in her way of looking at and reflecting on the world around the age of six or seven.[7] In one of his classic experiments, researchers show a four-year-old child two identical drinking glasses each half filled with water. “Is there the same amount of water in both glasses?” the child is asked. “Yes,” says the child. Then the researcher pours the water from one of the glasses into a tall, thin cylinder so that the water level is now much higher in the cylinder than it is in the remaining drinking glass. “Now is there the same amount of water?” “No,” says the child, “that one [the tall cylinder] has more.” Researchers then repeat the same experiment with a child two or three years older and discover a different result. The older child sees (as we do) that even though the second glass of water has been poured into a tall, thin cylinder, it still has the same amount of water as the first glass. It just *looks* like more. Piaget suggested that simple experiments like this one reveal a fundamental difference between the thinking structures of the four-year-old and the seven-year-old. Younger children are deceived by the outer appearances of things, Piaget wrote, while older children can execute *mental operations* on a situation like the one above. They can reverse in their mind the actions that were performed by *imaginatively* pouring the water from the cylinder back into the second drinking glass, understanding that the actual quantity of water never changed during the pouring.

This ability to implement what are simple mathematical operations, similar to addition and subtraction, has all sorts of ramifications for the world of the school-aged child according to Piaget and his followers.[8] It means that children can now begin to pull away from the purely sensory properties of concrete objects and think about the abstract traits that they possess: their blueness, squareness, heaviness, thinness, or wetness. They can start to classify, categorize, order, seriate, and in other ways mentally operate on the vast assemblage of things in their world. Piaget gives an example of the revelatory nature of such a newfound mental power in the life of a child in this recollection of a mathematician friend learning to count for the first time as a five-year-old: “He was seated on the ground in his garden and he was counting pebbles. Now to count these pebbles he put them in a row and he counted them one, two, three, up to ten. Then he finished counting them and started to count them in the other direction. He began by the end and once again found he had ten. He found this marvelous

. . . So he put them in a circle and counted them that way and found ten once again."[9]

CONCEPT FORMATION: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

Some of these cognitive revelations between the ages of five and seven have a quality of *remembering* about them. While we will see below that children at this age seem to be spending most of their time *adapting* to the social world around them, it appears that certain aspects of these new thinking abilities may be *coming down from the spirit* and reminding them about the deeper dimensions of life.[10] One adult, remembering back to a grammar lesson she had in school at the age of seven, reported: "I had an extraordinarily vivid insight, which is absolutely beyond description but which has remained with me ever since as an abiding spiritual experience. The teacher was explaining that in addition to common nouns and proper nouns there were also abstract nouns, which mostly ended in "-ness," such as goodness, badness, etc.; also a number of short but very important words such as love, hate, etc. It was at this point that I seemed to grow up mentally."[11] In another case, a seventy-five-year-old man remembered being seven years old and preparing to go out on a walk when he had the following thought: "'Here am I, a little boy of seven; I wonder where I was eight years ago.' At that tremendous thought I stood rooted to the carpet . . . with a wave of tremendous feeling sweeping over me. I suddenly felt old and aware of being somebody very ancient . . . Eight years ago, thought I, why not eighty or eight hundred?"[12] The Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg reported having a spiritual experience with the logical properties of music as a five-year-old: "Why not begin by remembering the wonderful, mystical satisfaction of stretching one's arms up to the piano and bringing forth—not a melody. Far from it! No, it had to be a chord. First a third, then a fifth, then a seventh. And finally, both hands helping—Oh joy!—a ninth, the dominant ninth chord. When I had discovered this my rapture knew no bounds. That was a success! Nothing since has been able to elate me so profoundly as this."[13] It almost seems as if a higher mind were incarnating in the child at this time, allowing him to step back from his immediate surroundings and see himself in the context of a greater whole.

Once children begin to engage in this sort of “transcendental thinking,” they can also start to put themselves in the shoes of another person and imagine what the world might look like from their point of view, just as they are able to mentally project themselves on to both sides of the drinking glass experiment. This makes it possible for the child to engage in a mutual give-and-take with others, a process that underlies virtually all later social communication and engagement. You can see this process at work by watching a group of elementary school-aged kids playing a game of sandlot ball without adult supervision. Gone are the fuzzy parameters of early childhood where rules were made up on the spot and could be changed at the whim of any participant. These older kids seem to spend as much time arguing *about* the game as actually playing it. They squabble about whether a player touched second base, tagged the guy out at home, hit a ball within the foul line, or any of a thousand other scenarios. Questions of *fairness* predominate as the children use their new mental abilities to interpret formal rules that are designed to apply as much to one side as to the other.

Here we begin to see one of the most essential features of life in middle childhood. Kids are moving out of their family and neighborhood circle into a much broader and more complex social arena, and *they want to know what the rules are* in this larger world. So, society tells them. As we noted earlier, children at this age are capable of understanding categories and concepts like blueness, thinness, goodness, and badness. As a result, they are now also primed to learn the rules of societal prejudice. This is the age of stereotypes, the age of learning how to put people and things into little boxes: “ugly/cute,” “stupid/smart,” “nerdy/cool.” Kids at this age are hungry to internalize the strictures of the surrounding community and take on the mores of their particular cultural context with a vengeance. They learn about patriotism and about the rightness of killing other human beings —“foreigners,” “aliens” or “terrorists”—who threaten their country. They learn the dogma of their family’s religion, and begin to understand that “nonbelievers” will burn in hell for eternity or suffer some comparable fate. They learn that the people down the block from them are “chinks,” “spics,” or “wackos,” because of the way they look, the way they talk, or the beliefs they hold. In his classic book on prejudice, psychologist Gordon Allport recalled one child’s need for a “refresher course” on what she had been taught in this regard by her parents: “Janet, six years of age, was trying hard to integrate her obedience to her mother with her daily social contacts. One

day she came running home and asked, ‘Mother, what is the name of the children I am supposed to hate?’”[14]

ENCOUNTERING DYSTEACHIA

Besides the family, school is the primary formal institution for instilling social values and skills in middle childhood. It is the place where the older generation has the opportunity to sit down large numbers of the younger generation in one location and instruct them in those competencies that are believed to be most critical for the continued survival of the community. If the culture is a hunting society, then school will take place on the run. If the culture is an agrarian one, then the school will take place in the fields. If the culture is made up of artisans, then children will literally sit at the feet of master cobblers, weavers, and smiths and learn their craft by practicing it over and over again. And if the culture is a modern literate society such as our own, then school will take place in specially designed buildings set aside for the purpose of learning how to read, write, calculate, and compute. Instead of expert farmers, hunters, tailors, or other members of the living culture, our culture has designated a group of specially trained individuals whom we call “teachers” who are experts in using abstract symbol systems, and who attempt as best they can to instruct youngsters in skills that will promote their success in a complex technological society. The difficulty comes when most of this instruction takes place within the walls of an artificial learning environment called a *classroom* rather than out in the real world where this knowledge can be immediately applied to practical situations that have real meaning for children. This gap between the spuriousness of school culture and the authenticity of the real world has been a significant problem that continues to bedevil educators despite wave after wave of school reform.

And yet modern schooling does end up teaching kids quite a bit about how the world works. Kids learn how to sit still for long periods of time at small desks, just as they will have to sit at desks in corporate “cube farms” when they grow up. They learn how to submit to authority, follow bureaucratic rules, and compete against their peers for rewards and advantages, again, in preparation for what will come later on in adulthood. They also learn not to question too much, think too differently from their peers, or be too creative as they progress through the grades. Jules Henry,

an anthropologist who did field research in American classrooms in the same way that his colleagues collected data from rain-forest cultures, once wrote: “The schools have never been places for the stimulation of young minds. If all through school the young were provoked to question the Ten Commandments, the sanctity of revealed religion, the foundations of patriotism, the profit motive, the two-party system, monogamy, the laws of incest and so on, we would have more creativity than we could handle. In teaching our children to accept fundamentals of social relationships and religious beliefs without question we follow the ancient highways of the human race, which extend backward into the dawn of the species, and indefinitely into the future.”[15] It’s probably true that schools are the most conservative of all cultural institutions, relentlessly seeking to pass on the rules of a damaged society to the next generation. As world philosopher and teacher J. Krishnamurti points out: “Of what value is it to be trained as lawyers if we perpetuate litigation? Of what value is knowledge if we continue in our confusion? What significance has technical and industrial capacity if we use it to destroy one another?”[16]

Brain connections continue to be “pruned” during this period of middle childhood, and schooling certainly has a lot to do with this process. While formal schooling *does* recognize certain kinds of abilities in its students and develops them into maturity—the ability to read, write, and solve logical problems being foremost among them—it also serves as a gatekeeper to prevent many other capacities, talents, and abilities from ever being recognized and nurtured. Many children enter kindergarten or first grade brimming with artistic, musical, physical, aesthetic, poetic, spiritual, philosophical, mechanical, practical, or other creative talents, only to have little or no attention paid to these gifts by teachers or parents. As a result, these abilities—and the brain connections that sustain them—are literally starved out of existence from sheer neglect. Children at this age learn from countless standardized tests beginning in preschool and kindergarten that they are either “smart” or “dumb.” Some jubilantly learn that they are “gifted,” while others have the disappointment of discovering that they are “slow,” or merely “average.” Kids also learn that in order to survive, they need to master a number of tacit skills including currying favor with the teacher, cheating without getting caught, faking illness to get out of the classroom, and paying attention only to what is going to affect one’s grade or test results.

On the positive side, there certainly are wonderful and passionate teachers out there who have retained a connection with the *rememberer* inside of themselves, and who have managed to create a refuge of sorts for children in school. One adult recalling his second-grade teacher said: “She knew I liked to write. One day I was really restless, walking around, not paying attention. Then she gave us an assignment. We had to write something, and I wrote about walking around. She pulled me aside and said, ‘Why don’t you learn the word meander?’ I went home with a great new word and a great new attitude.”[17] Talk show host Oprah Winfrey credits her fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Duncan, at Wharton Elementary School in Nashville, Tennessee, with inspiring her to make something of herself in life. She commented: “For the first time, I wasn’t afraid to be smart . . . It was in her class that I really came into myself.”[18] Mrs. Duncan, without perhaps even knowing it, reminded Oprah of who she really is, and in this way affected millions of people worldwide who have been positively influenced by Oprah’s inspirational work, thus proving what writer Henry Adams said a hundred years ago: “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”[19]

Montessori and Waldorf schools are good examples of entire school systems that were created by *rememberers* who recognized the *spirit down* dimensions of classroom learning. Maria Montessori wrote: “The child becoming incarnate is a spiritual embryo which needs its own special environment.”[20] Her schools allow children to work at their own pace and honor the students’ ability to become totally absorbed in a learning activity as if it were a meditation or sacred experience. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf schools, believed that children didn’t fully incarnate into their physical bodies until age seven (an event marked by the change of teeth), and only then could they begin to fully engage in abstract skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Referring to the boisterous nature of childhood, he wrote: “Suppose all you clever and well brought up people were suddenly condemned to remain always in a room having a temperature of 144° Fahrenheit. You couldn’t do it! It is even harder for the spirit of the child, which has descended from the spiritual worlds, to accustom itself to earthly conditions. The spirit, suddenly transported into a completely different world, with the new experience of having a body to carry about, acts as we see the child act.”[21] Waldorf classrooms have a gentle atmosphere, with pastel colors, natural wood furniture, nonlinear

architecture, and an artistic focus. These two systems—Montessori and Waldorf—along with many other alternative school programs demonstrate that schools can be places for the nourishment of a child's soul. At the same time, the child's *body up* development is also worked with and nourished. Montessori schools provide a practical orientation to life skills such as cleaning, cooking, and gardening, and carefully plan out activities to help the child learn about how the world works using concrete manipulative materials. Waldorf schools also offer a balanced approach to learning that devotes a part of each day to activities that engage the body, the heart (emotions), and the head (intellect).

FROM LATENCY TO LATE CHILDHOOD

The child's process of coming *up from the body,* or emerging from her biological and physical origins, is particularly important at this time of life as she begins to gain greater control over her instincts. Children's energies at this age are like the winds that Aeolus stuffed into a bag for Odysseus as a gift on his journey, to be used only when he needed them to blow his ship back home to Ithaca. Freud called the time of middle childhood the "latency" years because of the child's ability to channel primitive emotional drives into socially acceptable—if at times barely acceptable—forms of expression. According to Freud, the powerful libidinal instincts of early childhood, as classically represented in the Oedipal urge of the young child to kill one parent and have sex with the other, become "latent" at this time; they essentially go underground during middle childhood only to emerge with renewed fury in the adolescent years.[22] There's some truth in what Freud said about this. One of the most comprehensive recent studies of sex and children indicated that observed sexual activity peaks at around age five, and then undergoes a steady decline until ages eleven or twelve.[23] What's missing from this account, of course, is the developmental fact that children at this age become more private with their sexuality, and engage in masturbation, exploratory activities with peers, and other sexual pursuits in secret where their activities can't be tabulated by sociologists or snoopy parents.

At the same time, however, it's also true to say that children at this age become better at doing constructive things with their instincts. They put their energies into engaging in sports, hanging out with friends, reading,

exploring nature, playing with toys, and collecting things. It's almost as if much of the libidinal energy that was on the verge of boiling over in early childhood is now bound up in each of the little action figures, dolls, trading cards, or other things that kids accumulate during middle childhood. "What benefits come from collecting 376 rusty bottle caps, 208 green marbles, 452 unmatched playing cards, and a string of 1,000 paper clips?" asks former school psychologist and author Dorothy Corkille Briggs. "They are *symbols* —psychological tools—that nourish self-esteem. They bring the joy of initiating, the excitement of the hunt, the comfort of status, the fascination of management, and the pride of ownership. The youngster gets experience in controlling, possessing, planning and trading."[24]

We observed in the last chapter how children in early childhood begin to develop rituals, routines, and defenses that help to ward off painful experiences that come from contact with the outside world. In middle childhood, this ability becomes even more refined as the child develops the capacity to handle feelings of rejected love, humiliation, embarrassment, jealousy, anger, and fear through an increasingly sophisticated arsenal of language tricks and social tools. I remember how I coped with insults in the third grade. I had only to say to the insulter the words "A skunk smells his own tracks first!" to remove the sting of hurt. My friends at the time had a ritual for deflecting attention away from a potentially embarrassing burp or fart. They would say the phrase: "Bulldog slugs, no return, knock on wood," and then hurriedly knock on some nearby piece of wood and proceed to slug the person nearest to them! In my capacity as a teacher in elementary school decades later, I heard other choice "comeback lines." For example, if a child had just insulted a peer and an onlooker wanted to line himself up with the offender to protect himself from future insult, he would say to the insulted party: "What a burn, what a cut, stick a finger up your butt!" Phrases like this one give kids an opportunity to express sexual and aggressive feelings in a carefully structured way. In my elementary school days, a good way to express anger and frustration toward a teacher was to sing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" with these words: "Glory, glory hallelujah, teacher hit me with a ruler, bopped her in the bean with a rotten tangerine, and she won't be coming round no more." There are literally thousands of songs, routines, pranks, and tricks that kids use in middle childhood to ward off unpleasantness and to help bolster their emerging egos. This kind of "child lore" was invented by kids, without adult

involvement, and has been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years in one form or another.

Child lore includes a wide variety of tongue twisters, puns, riddles, and jokes that give kids a chance to show off their growing sophistication with language. There are also physical and emotional challenges with games such as “Truth, Dare, Double Dare, Promise, or Repeat” and “Captain, May I?” There are ghost stories, rumors, and gory tales like “The Dead Hitchhiker” and “The Golden Arm” to help channel anxiety and demonstrate mastery over the unknown. There are preteen games like “Kiss or Kill” and “Spin the Bottle,” or jump-rope rhymes (“Mary Mack, dressed in black, silver buttons down her back. I love coffee. I love tea. I love the boys in the C.L.B.”) to channel burgeoning sexual and aggressive drives. There are levitation tricks that involve pressing your arms against a door jamb to debunk the magic of early childhood, and devices like “cootie catchers” that serve as a way of shunning people perceived as having negative qualities. As folklorists Peter and Iona Opie, who devoted their lives to collecting child lore from the British Isles and America, explained: “The scraps of lore which children learn from each other are at once more real, more immediately serviceable, and more vastly entertaining to them than anything which they learn from grown-ups.”[25]

While kids in middle childhood have an increasing number of defenses to help them cope with the emotional fallout around them, they also have the ability to express a growing variety of complex emotions in the course of daily life when compared with younger children. Rudolf Steiner believed that the key to understanding this time of life lay in acknowledging and nurturing the *feeling* nature of the child. He called this time “the *heart* of childhood” to emphasize the importance of addressing emotions and the imagination. He noted that kids especially need rhythmic experiences in middle childhood, observing how much they enjoy jump-rope rhymes and hopscotch out on the playground, and emphasizing rhythms as they read books or sing songs. This love of rhythm extends to the emotions as well. Steiner observed that children at this age move naturally between the poles of emotion. As British Waldorf educator A. C. Harwood pointed out: “How deeply children love to swing between the poles! What good lovers they are and what good haters! They must always have a favourite colour, a favourite flower, a favourite pudding. What they do not like is horrible and disgusting beyond expression. And how quickly they change. A little girl

who has had a bosom friend for a week will make a face when her name is mentioned the week after: but a few days later they are arm in arm again."[26] As children advance to the age of nine or ten, their feelings change and become more subtle and nuanced. Their sense of subjectivity deepens and they develop a richer inner world to complement the busy social world of which they are becoming more and more an integral part. It is to this story of late childhood that we now turn in the next chapter.

THE GIFT OF MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: IMAGINATION

"Imagination is more important than knowledge," said Albert Einstein. If this is true, then children are smarter than college professors with encyclopedic minds. Middle childhood is a time when the vivid imagery of early childhood that combined inner and outer experiences transforms itself into a subjective imagination that is distinctly different from the objective world beyond the mind. This imagination may be all that links many children between the ages of five and ten to the spiritual worlds they inhabited more fully and freely during infancy and early childhood. Through imagination, children can bring entire worlds and civilizations into being. Many kids find their subjective daydreams far more interesting than anything they experience in school or around the house. Sadly, most adults consider the daydreams of children unimportant and a waste of time. The truth is that many of the greatest discoveries made in the twentieth century —Einstein's theory of relativity, Darwin's theory of evolution, and Freud's theory of the unconscious—have their roots in imaginative thinking. Images are like seeds that over time sprout into marvelous ideas with practical significance.

Most of us are too busy with our hectic lives to be concerned about imagination. We may occasionally remember a dream after waking, fantasize playing golf during a boring meeting at work, or see images in our mind as we try to describe a recent movie to a friend. Modern society downplays the importance of imagination in favor of clear, logical thinking. Yet imagination has many potential benefits to those who are willing to nurture it and keep it alive. Imagination serves as a powerful method of stress reduction by taking the mind away from situations that create anxiety

or frustration, and by activating more pleasurable and healthy images. Visualizing a favorite place in nature, for example, may soothe and relax better than pain-killing medications. Imagination provides a rich source of creative ideas for the home and the workplace. Strategic problems are often best solved with a spouse at home or a group at work by imagining a wide range of possible solutions and then combining the best parts of each one. Imagination prevents us from getting stuck in a rut. It is the soil in which the creative life thrives. Just by allowing ourselves to imagine new possibilities in the way we work, play, relate, and think we can change our fortunes and create new realities that exceed anything we've previously known. This wonderful gift of middle childhood is always available to us if we periodically close our eyes and explore the marvelous wonderland of images that exist in our mind's eye.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

FOR YOURSELF

- Write down any memories you have of imaginative experiences between the ages of five and ten. If you have artwork from this period stored away, take it out and look at the themes you were concerned with in middle childhood. What do they tell you about your fears, loves, hates, and hopes during this time of life?
- Write down any memories you might have about sexual experiences (with others or alone) between the ages of five and ten. Reflect on the impact that these experiences had on your later life.
- Write down any thoughts that occur to you about your early school experiences. If you have old school records (report cards, photos, samples of schoolwork), take them out and notice what they have to tell you about your early experiences with formal education.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Tutor a five- to ten-year-old child (your own or a friend's) who has been labeled as having "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder," "learning disabilities," or "autistic spectrum disorder." Spend some time helping the child identify his particular strengths and talents, and then seek ways to develop them.

- Share examples of “child lore” from your middle childhood with a group of friends. Put together a scrapbook of these memories. Do you observe that today’s children have their own child lore, or has today’s mass media largely replaced it?

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Help to preserve children’s imaginations by supporting storytelling, creative writing, and the expressive arts at your community center, library, or local elementary school.
- Support Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, or other alternative school programs in your community that address the *spirit down* as well as the *body up* developmental needs of children. Investigate the possibility of integrating one of these approaches into the public school system of your community.
- Get involved in a school program that helps teach kids about prejudice, racism, and the need for tolerance (e.g., the Teaching Tolerance program of the Southern Poverty Law Center). If no such program exists, help to create one in your community.

CHAPTER 6

Late Childhood

BECOMING A PART OF THE CROWD

When I was a little girl in the fourth grade I used, after not too happy days, to look forward with eagerness to the time when I went to bed, when I could lie unmolested by other people and weave fantasies. . . . I dreamed that I was a lovely young woman in Holland, with a beautifully kept house and gardens and dairy, and spotless clothes and a pretty crisp cap.

FROM FRANCES G. WICKES,
THE INNER WORLD OF CHILDHOOD[1]

Almost everyone is familiar with the fairy tale where the girl kisses the frog and he turns into a prince. Most people don't know, however, that the original Brothers Grimm tale was not quite so romantic. It actually went something like this: Once upon a time, a princess was playing alone under an old lime tree near a well. She was throwing a golden ball up in the air and catching it with great delight, but one time she missed and the ball rolled into the well. The princess cried deeply for the loss of her favorite plaything. Suddenly, she heard a voice from the well say: "I can get that ball back for you, but what will you give me in return?" It was a big ugly frog. The princess was so happy that she said, "Whatever you want, frog!" He replied: "Will you let me sit at your dinner table, and eat from your plate, and sleep in your little bed?" She was so desperate to get the ball back that she immediately said, "Yes, of course!" The frog retrieved the ball for her, and the princess ran back to her castle, completely forgetting about

him and the promise she'd made. The next day she was eating a meal with her family when the frog came to the castle and reminded her of her vow. She was appalled at the suggestion, but her father the king said that she had to keep her promise. So she let the frog sit at her table and eat from her plate, even though she found it totally repulsive. Then the frog reminded her that she had promised to let him sleep in her little bed. This she adamantly refused to allow, until her father again told her that she had to fulfill her obligations. Quite upset, she took the frog into her bedroom and put him into a corner saying: "There! Now keep quiet, frog!" But he insisted on sleeping in her bed. This enraged the princess so much that she took the frog in her hands and threw him violently against the wall. As he fell to the floor, he turned into a handsome prince. That night they went to bed, and the next day they sped off in a royal carriage to the prince's kingdom where they lived happily ever after.[2]

This fairy tale turns out to be a rather remarkable description of late childhood as a transitional stage of human development. The princess who happily plays with her golden ball represents the magic of middle childhood, where the youngster is still engaged in a relatively carefree lifestyle and is immersed in playful scenarios, imaginary worlds, animated games, and high-spirited antics. But the princess loses the ball (curiously, there is an episode in Homer's *The Odyssey* when a young princess is playing outdoors and loses her ball).[3] The golden age of childhood, full of youthful spirituality and creativity, is coming to a close. As William Wordsworth put it (with emendation for the twenty-first century): "Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing [Child]." Something else emerges: a new kind of energy represented by the slimy frog. This is perhaps the dawning of sexuality, initially regarded by the preadolescent with loathing and disgust ("Boys, Ugh!"), but having an irresistible pull to it. Or possibly the frog is simply the harbinger of growing up in all of its alien glory. In any case, the child wants to stay in her carefree world and ignore this amphibious herald of things to come. But society, as represented here by the king, reminds the child that there are obligations and duties that must be kept. Late childhood is a time when the child must assume more responsibility in society; when household chores, homework, first jobs, tight schedules, higher parental expectations, and social pressures from one's own peer group impose greater burdens on daily life than ever before.

As one parenting expert put it: “A preteen’s social calendar can fill up tighter than an executive’s Palm Pilot.”[4] There is probably no other stage of life (except perhaps young adulthood) when the pressures to *adapt* to the surrounding world are so great, and when the voices to *remember* one’s spiritual origins are so faintly heard.[5]

As our fairy tale progresses, a palpable tension can be felt building up inside of the princess as she confronts the frog’s insistent demands. This mirrors the growing sense that preadolescents have of becoming separate individuals set apart from the environment and no longer Mommy’s or Daddy’s little boy or girl. Events in our fairy tale ultimately crescendo to a violent conclusion, pointing to the hormonal upsurges of puberty in adolescence, and the story concludes with a royal union that could be either an actual marriage, or a state of psychological integration where the child is transformed, like the frog, into a mature person in her own right. At heart, then, this classic story, which is widely celebrated and spoofed in contemporary media, seems to be a coming-of-age tale containing an acutely perceptive account of the sensitive dynamics that are involved as a child makes her way through the triumphs and struggles of late childhood and then moves on.

THE MAGIC AGE OF TEN

A key event at the beginning of late childhood—which just might be the biochemical equivalent of the slimy frog in our fairy tale—is *adrenarche.* Often confused with puberty (which will be explored in the next chapter), *adrenarche* marks a critical stage in the maturation of the cortex of the adrenal glands, the two triangle-shaped endocrine organs that sit above the kidneys. According to biopsychologist Martha K. McClintock, “Our culture regards . . . childhood as a time of hormonal quiescence . . . But actually a great deal of activity is going on.”[6] McClintock and her colleague, anthropologist Gilbert Herdt, point out that the adrenal glands begin increasing their production of a hormone associated with sexual attraction, dihydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), around the age of six and this production reaches a critical level in the endocrine system at about age ten, precipitating the occurrence of *adrenarche.* The most evident signs that occur as a result of this biological event are the first appearance of pubic hair (*pubarche*) and the beginning of adultlike body odor as a result of

chemical changes in the composition of sweat. From a psychological perspective, several studies indicate that children begin to feel a sexual chemistry for others around this time, and that this is true of both straight and gay populations. McClintock and Herdt, for example, share the story of a gay eighteen-year-old male from Chicago who remembered watching the television program *Star Trek* with his family: "He reports that he was ten years old and had not yet developed any obvious signs of puberty. When Captain Kirk suddenly peeled off his shirt, the boy was titillated. At ten years of age, this was his first experience of sexual attraction."[7]

It's around this age—fourth grade—that one can begin to observe the presence of a palpable sexual tension between boys and girls, with teasing, chasing, gossip, and kissing starting to replace the staunchly militant same-sex groups that were so characteristic of life in the lower grades. Blogger Ryan MacMichael writes, "I remember my first kiss quite fondly . . . I'm talking about the time in fourth grade when my friend Josh had a boy/girl party and we decided to break out a bottle and do a little spinning . . . I remember one girl getting especially grossed out when my friend Pat tried to slip her the tongue. In any event, my first kiss was with Josh's super-shy cousin. All I remember is that she had red hair and barely said a word the whole party. Ah . . . but I made her smile after my spin landed on her."[8] Sometimes, there is a quality of *remembering* in these first encounters with the opposite sex. The Italian poet Dante Alighieri reported that he was almost ten years old when he saw eight-year-old Beatrice Portinari at a May Day party at the Portinaris' family home in Florence. He wrote, "The moment I saw her I say in all truth that the vital spirit, which dwells in the inmost depths of the heart, began to tremble so violently that I felt the vibration alarmingly in all my pulses, even the weakest of them . . . Love ruled over my soul."[9] Dante would later immortalize Beatrice by making her his spiritual guide through Paradise in *The Divine Comedy.*

Late childhood also marks important changes in the development of the brain. As we noted in the chapter on early childhood, metabolic rates in the brain of a three-year-old are double that of an adult's and continue at that level from about the age of four to ten. Around age ten, however, metabolic rates begin to decline until they reach normal adult levels by ages sixteen to eighteen.[10] Brain researcher Marian Diamond notes that "a child below the age of ten can lose part of the cerebral cortex near the language area—even

the entire right hemisphere—and have no permanent difficulties speaking or interpreting language."[11] A more recent brain study shows that there is an actual *spike* in the growth of gray matter in the frontal and parietal lobes of the neocortex between the ages of ten and twelve.[12] "We were quite surprised," said psychiatrist and brain researcher Jay Giedd, the principal author of the study, "to see this unexpected increase in gray matter in the front part of the brain right before puberty. . . ."[13] Giedd speculates that the production of extra brain connections (if this, indeed, is the cause of the spike) may "herald a critical stage of development when the environment or activities of the teenager may guide selective synapse elimination during adolescence."[14] In other words, it may be that nature provides a brief abundance of gray matter in late childhood, just as it did for very young children, so that the environment can strengthen those connections necessary for survival (in this case, perhaps for mate seeking, care of young, or building a home), and eliminate synapses (brain connections) that are not needed, just at a time when kids are on the verge of procreating and thus able to pass their genes on to the next generation.

Something that is particularly noteworthy at this age is how ingenious kids can be in coming up with strategies for avoiding homework, improvising special tricks for solving math or science problems, or creating inventions for saving time and energy. (Recently, for example, a ten-year-old girl invented and trademarked Wristies, which are protective winter gear [long, fingerless gloves] designed to prevent snow, wind, and cold from entering the gaps in sleeves.) Preteens are a little like "the great tactician" Odysseus tricking the Cyclops, inventing the Trojan Horse, or coming up with a solution for hearing the song of the Sirens while steering his men back home to Ithaca. Like Odysseus, they use their "street smarts" to help them make it through the ups and downs of their journey through the "tween years."

The biochemical changes of late childhood also appear to herald a shift in the sense of identity. As Annie Dillard writes in her memoir *An American Childhood*: "Children ten years old wake up and find themselves here, discover themselves to have been here all along . . . They wake like sleepwalkers, in full stride . . . equipped with a hundred skills. They know the neighborhood, they can read and write English, they are old hands at the commonplace mysteries, and yet they feel themselves to have just stepped

off the boat . . . just flown down from a trance, to lodge in an eerily familiar life already well under way."[15]

An incident in the life of Benjamin Franklin as a ten-year-old humorously illustrates this new sense of being squarely planted on the earth. Franklin lived near the water and one day convinced his friends to help him turn a nearby salt marsh into something with a sounder foundation. As he recalls in his well-known autobiography, ". . . by much trampling, we had [turned the marsh into] a mere quagmire. My proposal was to build a wharf there fit for us to stand upon, and I showed my comrades a large heap of stones, which were intended for a new house near the marsh, and which would very well suit our purpose."[16] In the evening, when the workmen had gone, they built their wharf and the next day got into trouble for stealing the stones. On a more profound level, Carl Jung wrote about a powerful experience of identity that occurred to him at the age of twelve: "I was taking the long road to school . . . when suddenly for a single moment I had the overwhelming impression of having just emeged from a dense cloud. I knew all at once: now I am myself! It was as if a wall of mist were at my back, and behind that wall there was not yet an 'I.' But at this moment I came upon myself."[17]

The experience of becoming a "self" is, however, a mixed blessing. As the child's sense of "I" becomes stronger, so too does the feeling of separation from the world. One adolescent remembered: "I used to have this recurring dream until I was about ten . . . There was no story . . . it was more of an image, a sensation; it was unpleasant. I could see waves, not necessarily sea waves, but they were often like that. They created a horrible, distressing distance between myself and the object of the dream I was having."[18] Children between the ages of ten and twelve start spending more time alone, thinking, reflecting, and brooding. I remember devoting a great deal of time at that age to listening to music on a small transistor radio alone in our basement. I listened to songs like Del Shannon's "Runaway," and "Raindrops" by Dee Clark, while feeling a new kind of emptiness or loneliness that hadn't been there before. British psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan wrote: "Loneliness reaches its full significance in the preadolescent era, and goes on relatively unchanged from thenceforth throughout life. Anyone who has experienced loneliness is glad to discuss some vague abstract of this previous experience of loneliness. But it is a

very difficult therapeutic performance to get anyone to remember clearly how he felt and what he did when he was horribly lonely."[19]

THE BIG LEARNING SLUMP

School can help alleviate some of that loneliness. But it also represents a new kind of obstacle to navigate in late childhood. For many, school gets a lot harder around this time, leaving the fun and games of the lower grades behind. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who had been happily writing whole novels at home as an eight- to ten-year-old, suddenly found things quite changed as an eleven-year-old when the academic pressures of his schoolwork became more severe: "I had even stopped writing. The 'novel notebooks' had been thrown out, mislaid, or burned and had made way for grammar, arithmetic, and dictation notebooks. If someone had crept into my head, which was open to all the winds, he would have come upon a few busts, a stray multiplication table and the rule of three, thirty-two counties with the chief town of each but not the sub-prefecture, a rose called *rosarosarosamrosaerosaerose*, some historical and literary monuments, a few polite maxims engraved on stiles, and sometimes, like a scar of mist hovering over this sad garden, a sadistic reverie."[20] These new demands on kids sometimes elicit cries of rebellion. Filmmaker Orson Welles, who in adulthood would shock millions of Americans with his *War of the Worlds* radio program simulating an invasion of Earth by Martians, created a furor as a fourth grader when he gave a lecture on art to the student body and began lambasting the school's teachers for their lack of creativity. "You mustn't criticize the public school system, Orson," one teacher called out, to which the fourth grader responded, "If the public school system needs criticizing, I will criticize it!"[21]

More often, these new school pressures give rise to what some elementary school teachers have referred to despairingly as "the fourth-grade slump." Originally coined by reading expert Jeanne Chall to describe the drop-off in test scores of low-income children from third to fourth grade, the term is now used more generically to describe the difficulties that students in fourth grade begin to experience as the reading load starts to pile up.[22] According to educator Anne Grosso de León, "The slightly larger desks waiting for fourth graders when they return to school in the fall are designed, after all, to accommodate more than their growing bodies. Piled

high on their new desks are a variety of new academic subject texts as well as samples of what is now called 'literature.' Their storybooks a fond memory, the children will be expected to read these new texts, laden with content and new vocabularies, not merely to demonstrate that they can sound out the words, but to demonstrate that they understand what they read."[23] The added pressure of schoolwork (smaller print, computer screens, detailed writing) often creates eyestrain. It's a fact that simple myopia (near-sightedness) is often called "school myopia," and generally starts between the ages of ten to twelve, just as these academic demands are beginning to mount.

The heavy emphasis that schools place on reading, writing, and reasoning, especially in these later grades, has come under criticism from some prominent educators. Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University, for example, suggests that schools primarily educate only two of the eight intelligences described in his book *Frames of Mind*: linguistic intelligence (reading, writing, and speaking) and logical-mathematical intelligence (reasoning, calculating, and experimenting). There are six other intelligences, however, that educators typically neglect in most classroom instruction: spatial (imagining, drawing, designing), bodily-kinesthetic (crafting, acting, displaying physical abilities), musical (listening, composing, performing on instruments), interpersonal (empathizing, negotiating, cooperating), intrapersonal (self-understanding, reflecting, feeling), and naturalist intelligences (discriminating, classifying, and nurturing living things).[24] Students who speak well, write well, and reason well are usually the ones who get the most praise, the best grades, and the highest test scores in school. On the other hand, students who learn best through one or more of the other intelligences—through pictures, physical experiences, music, social interactions, personal reflection, or experiences in nature—are put at a distinct disadvantage since teachers generally don't stray beyond the traditional lecture, textbook, and worksheet approach from the fourth grade on. Because of this, many talented students end up being put into remedial and special education programs.[25]

Children who are *rememberers* have a particularly difficult time in school in late childhood. These are usually the kids in late childhood who have somehow managed to hold on to the creative and spiritual perceptions of infancy and early and middle childhood despite all sorts of social

pressures to give up their "immaturity" and fit in with the rest of the crowd. These *spirit down* kids have special trouble *adapting* to the academic demands imposed on them from a school system steeped in social convention. In many cases, these kids are given negative school labels such as "learning disabled," "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder," or "autistic spectrum disorder."[26] I taught a number of kids like these in special education programs in Canada and the United States during the 1970s and early 1980s. Many of these kids were artists, writers, actors, philosophers, poets, and rebels who did not fit in with the normal routine of traditional classrooms. In the course of my teaching, I discovered that these students do not think in the linear, one-step-at-a-time manner that is valued most in school ("now class, say b-a-t, bat") nor do they excel in the memorization abilities that are the hallmark of a good test taker.[27] Instead, they tend to be holistic learners with active imaginations, novel perceptions, artistic creativity, spiritual charisma, diffuse attention, and a love of nature.[28] They prefer living in the here-and-now to preparing for the future and are not enticed by a parent's or teacher's exhortations that they hand in their homework or study hard to get into a good college. In many cases, their school days in regular classrooms are punctuated by a series of "paralyzing experiences" where they are yelled at, laughed at, or in other ways humiliated because of the fact that they are not in step with the inexorable march toward mediocrity of those around them.

I was not surprised when I discovered that a study of four hundred eminent individuals of the twentieth century revealed that 60 *percent* of them had serious school problems, including "dull, irrational, or cruel teachers . . . other students who bullied, ignored, or bored them . . . [and] school failure."[29] Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg made the mistake of bringing his first piano composition to school and performing it, after which the teacher said, "Next time, bring to school your German homework, and leave this stupid stuff at home."[30] Ignacy Jan Paderewski was told by his teacher that he could never expect to be a good pianist because his third fingers were too short. Albert Einstein was reported by his teachers to be "mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in his foolish dreams."[31]

Other turned-off students shift the focus of their attention away from the teacher's lessons and toward things that are more interesting. This is sometimes referred to as "the hidden curriculum." Johnny is whispering to Suzie about how Billy is going to get beat up after school because he let his

dog pee on Eddie's homework assignment the day before. Mrs. Jones's false teeth are making a funny noise, which elicits tittering from the class. A note is being passed around from student to student with the declaration, "The principal sucks!" This is where the excitement and vitality in a school is often located: everywhere except where it actually *should* be happening, that is, in the formal curriculum. The presence of these kinds of subterranean activities suggests the existence of another layer of life in late childhood paralleling the official school program: a *peer culture* or social milieu that has virtually nothing to do with the adults in their midst. Research suggests that peer relationships in preadolescence may have more importance as a socializing influence than either teachers or parents.[32]

THE POWERS AND PERILS OF PEERS

Peer culture represents a whole new phenomenon for kids between the ages of nine and twelve. The cliques of late childhood start to replace the clubs of middle childhood. Mall shopping replaces jump-rope hopping for girls. Violent interactive video games replace superhero action figures as a source of entertainment for boys. Rumors and gossip replace the overt insults and accusations of earlier grades. Cell phones and social networking sites replace, or at least supplement, neighborhoods and playgrounds as significant centers of social intercourse. Late childhood is when kids begin to worry big time about what others, especially their peers, think about them. Popularity becomes an important part of self-identity. Kids start to be more self-conscious about what they wear, what they weigh, what they smell like, who they hang out with, and whether or not they're in step with the latest trends.

Exposure to mass media, along with the pressures of living in a consumer-based society, fuel these concerns to a fever high pitch for some preadolescents. Surveys suggest that the more kids are exposed to media, the greater their concern about weight. An estimated 71 percent of American kids, ages eight to eighteen, have a TV in their room. Exposed to images of thin models, glamorous movie stars, and elegant cosmetic queens, girls as young as ten years old begin a serious regimen of dieting. One mother, speaking about preadolescent peer culture in Sarasota, Florida, writes, "It's a world where taunts of 'fatty' follow the chubby 10-year-old onto school buses, and even slender 12-year-olds try to live on Diet Coke

and salads because they're desperate to look like Jennifer Aniston."[33] Such a climate can set the stage for major physical and emotional problems in adolescence. University of Minnesota public health expert Nancy E. Sherwood notes, "Weight preoccupation in prepubertal girls is a concern because dieting at this age can impact growth and may increase risk for fatigue, irritability, low self-esteem, depression and eating disorders."[34]

Preteen boys, on the other hand, fed on raucous movies, violent television programs, and brutal video games, regard aggression, acting out, and being "cool" as the most prized behaviors within their peer group. Nine-to twelve-year-old boys constitute the greatest percentage of any group in the life span taking medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).[35] Studies suggest that tough, antisocial boys are often the most popular kids in school as judged not only by their peers but, amazingly, by their teachers as well.[36] Also important to this age group is athletic prowess and muscular strength. I remember being physically threatened by a fellow student on a field near school in sixth grade and, feeling humiliated by the encounter, responded by going home and trying to persuade my parents to get me some George Jowett weight-lifting equipment.[37] Nowadays, kids may go even further. A recent news report suggests that boys as young as ten are bulking up on steroids or legal derivatives like androstenedione—known as steroid precursors—simply so that they can look good.[38] At the same time, many boys and girls at this age, seeking to emulate popular sports figures, movie stars, and other media icons, are beginning to develop drug, alcohol, and/or cigarette habits that may turn out to be a regular part of their adult lifestyle. Twenty-nine percent of kids have had an alcoholic drink before the age of thirteen. In one study of adolescents in a juvenile detention facility, the average age for starting to experiment with inhalants was 9.7 years old, for marijuana 11.9 years old, and for cigarettes 11.2 years old.[39] According to the Carnegie Council on Adolescence, the preteen years are especially crucial in prevention efforts because preteens are often affected by shifting and inconsistent expectations, personal contradictions, and an increased sense of isolation.[40]

One thing that can help counteract some of these negative influences is a close friendship. As writer Mary Shelley put it, "The companions of our childhood always possess a certain power over our minds which hardly any later friend can obtain."[41] Friendships that bloom in late childhood often are

our first mature relationships, containing plenty of give and take and emotional highs and lows. In these friendships we could trade secrets, gossip, comics or cards, learn about sex and other mysteries, copy each other's homework, find out how other people's families live, get into trouble, compete at sports or games, argue, fight, and sever relations, only to make up all over again, and all this without adult interference. British psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan placed a particular importance on the finding of a best friend or a "chum" around the age of nine or ten. He suggested that these primarily same-sex relationships represented the beginnings of "something very like full-blown, psychiatrically defined love."[42] If and when you developed such a friendship in late childhood, it was very probably the first time that you extended to another person the same quality of caring that you felt for yourself.

This kind of relationship, according to Sullivan, provides a buffer against the stresses and strains of living on the threshold of adolescence. Psychologist Michael Thompson, in his book *Best Friends, Worst Friends: Understanding the Social Lives of Children*, illustrates such a relationship with his story of Kate and Ann, two girls who became best friends early in the seventh grade. Kate was a newcomer to the school, uninitiated in the mysteries of boy-girl relationships, and still very much involved in the playfulness of middle childhood. Ann was one of the most popular kids in her class, socially adept and a bit rebellious, but was going through a difficult time with her parents' recent divorce. Ann gave Kate credibility with her peer group. As Thompson writes, "Ann loans Kate confidence, clothes, and status in the group. During the school day, Kate is able to say, 'Ann and I bought a bunch of magazines this weekend,' or 'Ann and I went swimming.' The other girls in their class remain a bit mystified by the whole thing. But those precious words 'Ann and I' render Kate worthy of their attention."[43] On the other hand, Kate keeps Ann in touch with the magic of childhood. On Saturday afternoons, they play at being horses, canter down hills, and make loud whinnying noises. Thompson observes, ". . . Kate offers Ann an important perspective on life. Playing imaginary horse games with Kate gives Ann a break. It's as if she has turned her speeding car off the superhighway of seventh grade for a quiet amble down two-lane roads familiar to her from earlier in her life."[44] In a sense, Ann introduces Kate to the green frog while Kate gives Ann a chance to keep on throwing the golden ball.

Friendships aside, as children begin to move into early adolescence, it seems as if something quite serious begins to kick in. Kids appear to lose some of their exuberance and zip. Girls in particular seem to be at risk for slipping into the doldrums. According to developmental researchers Carol Gilligan and Lyn Mikel Brown, "For over a century, the edge of adolescence has been identified as a time of heightened psychological risk for girls. Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves, and their character."[45] At the age of eleven, Gloria Steinem fell into a depression after her parents divorced and her mother became ill: Her biographer reports, "She slept in the upper bunk, and her bed became her nest and retreat. 'Why am I not happy?' she would ask herself, wondering simultaneously if she were not being a bit melodramatic. She also found that if she lay on her back and concentrated very hard, she could reduce her field of vision until it encompassed only one small square of white plasterboard ceiling about a foot above her head. Then she would soothe herself. 'This is clean,' she would tell herself. 'This is neat. I'm just not going to look at any other place.'"[46]

Typical childhood vitality seems to go into hiding as children near adolescence. It often comes out only in dreams and daytime fantasies tinged with a range of vague and sometimes troubling emotional themes covering self, other, and the increasingly expanding world. One twelve-year-old girl remembered the following dream: "I am on a giant web and there is a giant spider coming towards me. She is smiling but as she gets nearer she lets out a horrible scream, so high it hurts my ears. She becomes scarey [sic] and ugly. She gets really close to me and I am stuck on the web unable to move. She looks like she is going to kill me and then she scuttles back to the beginning, puts on a smile, and it begins again. It goes on for ages."[47] While representing a full-blown nightmare, this dream is, in another sense, a presentiment of sorts. For it appears that the green frog and the handsome prince of our fairy tale are now giving way to something even darker that lurks just around the corner. It's to the topic of adolescence that we turn in the next chapter.

THE GIFT OF LATE CHILDHOOD: INGENUITY

As a preadolescent, Frederick Douglass desperately wanted to learn how to read and write but was forbidden to do so by his slave masters. His solution was to trade bread for reading lessons from hungry little white boys as he pursued his master's errands on the streets of Baltimore. In this way he became literate, and as an adult, used his knowledge to lead the anti-slavery movement in the United States. Frederick Douglass's story illustrates how much ingenuity kids possess between the ages of nine and twelve. Having become familiar with the rules and responsibilities of society, preteens are able to use their savvy to come up with novel solutions to difficult problems. This is an age when many kids are fascinated with inventions and gadgets. Few people know, for example, that an eleven-year-old, Frank Epperson, invented the Popsicle in 1905. Recently, Taylor Hernandez, age ten, invented "Magic Sponge Blocks," which are large building blocks made from sponge that a child can safely stack without worrying that they could fall and hurt someone. Sometimes this ingenuity shows up in the way that kids are able to manipulate their way out of household chores or school assignments, or convince us to give them what they want for holidays or birthdays. At other times, kids put on their thinking caps and try to solve the big problems of poverty, disease, and war.

We need to treasure and cultivate this kind of ingenuity in our adult lives. Every day we encounter problems that require creative solutions from fixing a leak in the kitchen sink to placating the boss at work. All too often we put the problem out of our minds or defer to an "expert" to take care of the matter. But each little difficulty we find ourselves in offers an opportunity to generate some kind of ingenious response. Perhaps all that's needed is for us to "MacGyver" a leak with a rubber band, or sweeten up the boss with a box of candy. At other times, the situation demands that we go beyond easy answers and generate a number of truly innovative possibilities in order to come up with just the right solution. Ingenuity can help a burned-out employee, for example, brainstorm ideas for a self-run business that is badly needed but that no one has ever thought of before. After all, it was this kind of ingenuity that led Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak to create the first home computer, inspired Wally Amos to establish a gourmet line of chocolate chip cookies, and directed Martha Stewart to turn household chores into a multimillion-dollar business. Developing or reclaiming ingenuity in our lives also helps to keep the mind active so that it doesn't become rigid from lack of use. By taking time each

day to consider novel ways of responding to life's daily challenges, we can ensure that our lives will never be boring, and that the zest for problem-solving and creative thinking will remain vigorous and vibrant within us for as long as we live.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT LATE CHILDHOOD

FOR YOURSELF

- Recall your academic experiences from late childhood. Look at old report cards or other school-related documents from that time and notice what they tell you about your school experience. Did you go through anything like "fourth-grade slump" when you were in school? (Perhaps it started in an earlier or later grade.) Write about the attitudes you had about yourself as a learner and as a preteen.
- Bring to mind your friends between the ages of nine and twelve. What kinds of things did you do together? Do you still keep in touch with them? If not, consider contacting one or more of them and reminiscing about old times.
- Write down any memories you have concerning intimate relationships between the ages of nine and twelve. Do you remember feeling a "sexual chemistry" with any particular person during this time in your life? If so, write about this experience and how it affected your later life.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Tutor the child of a family member or friend who is having academic difficulties with her homework assignments or other school-related tasks.
- Counsel a preteen you know who has been experimenting with drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes. In a nonjudgmental way, let them know about the dangers of developing life-threatening habits with these substances. If possible, engage peers or older role models who don't smoke, or use drugs or alcohol, to talk with them about why staying away from these substances is a good idea.
- Volunteer to take a group of neighborhood kids, aged nine to twelve, on an overnight camping adventure or to a nearby cultural or historical attraction.

For the Community

- Get involved in a community program that seeks to prevent substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, smoking) among children in late childhood.
- Encourage your child's school or school district to use innovative learning methods that employ art, music, nature, physical activity, social interaction, and personal reflection to teach basic academic subjects. Volunteer to come into class and provide some of these alternative learning strategies to individuals or small groups.
- Be a Big Brother or Big Sister to a needy youngster, or sign up to be a leader for a scouting or recreational organization for kids.

CHAPTER 7

Adolescence

ADVENTURES IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

At the age of fifteen or sixteen . . . we live through great storms of feeling . . . love and anger, joy and scorn . . . go jolting through us like electric impulses, now engulfing the whole world, then again shriveling into nothing; sadness, tenderness, nobility, and generosity of spirit form the vaulting empty skies above us.

—ROBERT MUSIL[1]

One of the greatest dramatic plays in the Western world—Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—is a literary work that has puzzled and fascinated critics for centuries. And yet this play seems somehow more accessible to us when we keep in mind that its principal characters, Hamlet and Ophelia, were both *teenagers.* In that respect, they were very much like today's adolescents in their fascination with the supernatural, their rebellion against authority figures, their emotional instability, their cynicism, and their retreat into solitude. In the course of the play, Hamlet communes with the occult when he sees his father's ghost, vents his anger at his mother and stepfather, goes through periods of depression, and even considers suicide in his famous "to be or not to be" speech. In addition, he scorns the hypocrisy of the adults around him, feels called upon to take up his father's mantle but is wracked with self-doubt, and has continual troubles in translating his seemingly haphazard intentions into a clear plan of action. For her own part, Ophelia tries to put on a happy face as she is alternately loved and scorned by Hamlet, but eventually retreats into a poetic fantasy world that looks a little bit like schizophrenia, and ultimately drowns herself in a lake. These

behaviors seem strangely familiar to us because they remind us of experiences that have played themselves out in some form during our own, or a friend or relative's, adolescence. That both Hamlet and Ophelia failed at their respective developmental tasks in the play—Hamlet dying by homicide and Ophelia by suicide—serves only to underline the hazardous nature of this dramatic passage from childhood to adulthood. We all made it through these years to be reading this book right now, but there were times when it seemed like the world would end, and in some ways it actually did.

THE PERILS OF PUBERTY

There we were in late childhood, cruising along in prepubescent bodies that were constantly growing but doing so rather nicely and smoothly, thank you very much, when all of a sudden it seemed as if someone had pulled a string on our body suit without our permission and started all sorts of uncontrollable events spiraling into action. Arms and legs shot off in all directions. Zits came out of nowhere. Armpit sweat poured down shirts and dresses like Niagara Falls. Hair sprouted like crabgrass in secret places. New odors began to attract the attention of dogs and offend family members. For both boys and girls, new aches and pains, new physical sensations, and powerful and strange new emotions began to course through their bodies. At times, it seemed like all we could do was to hang on tight and ride it out.

In a biological sense, it was almost literally a rebirth. The biochemical triple play that initiates puberty—hypothalamus to pituitary gland to sex organs—was first set into motion during fetal life and early infancy. Instead of turning us into teenagers at six months of age, however, these processes went into hiding for nearly a decade before being reactivated just before adolescence. Then, guided by genetics, nutrition, and factors like stress and family dynamics, complex changes in the brain's neurochemistry initiated a renewal of that process. Triggered by a gene ironically named KiSS-1 and the neurotransmitter it encodes (kisspeptin), the hypothalamus secreted a substance called gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GRH), which stimulated the pituitary gland to release two forms of gonadotropin: luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone. These chemicals in turn activated the ovaries and testes to produce androgens and estrogens (sex

hormones), as well as the sperm and ova that make reproduction possible. Puberty had arrived!

Whether there were fanfares or Bronx cheers accompanying this new phase of development depended not on genetics, but on the surrounding culture.[2] A young girl having her *menarche* (first menstruation) in Navajo culture, for example, would likely be treated to general rejoicing from its members at this sign of moving into womanhood. In other cultures, however, reactions might have been more muted. Anne Frank, writing in her diary during the Nazi occupation of Holland, expressed ambivalent feelings about menstruation: "Each time I have a period . . . I have the feeling that in spite of all the pain, unpleasantness, nastiness, I have a sweet secret. . . ."[3] And for many girls, the arrival of menarche was accompanied by confusion and even scorn. In Paula Weidegger's book *Menstruation and Menopause*, one woman interviewed about her experience of menarche reported, "I had no information whatsoever, no hint that anything was going to happen to me . . . [when it started] I thought I was on the point of death from internal hemorrhage . . . What did my highly educated mother do? She read me a furious lecture about what a bad, evil, immoral thing I was to start menstruating at the age of eleven!"[4]

The situation for boys is even more problematic. There is very little precedent in modern American culture for discussing a boy's *semenarche* (first ejaculation) with him. In the few studies that have been done on the subject, boys have typically been reluctant to discuss their experiences with parents or peers.[5] British psychoanalyst Janet Sayers shares one man's befuddled recollection of the event: "I was eleven . . . it may have been later than eleven . . . probably in the spring . . . it might have been the winter . . . it could have been in the autumn, I don't remember . . . I danced very close to a very attractive girl. I was a child. Nobody had ever told me about wet dreams. I don't know anything about anything. And that night I had my first wet dream . . . I think I put two and two together. But it is very disconcerting not to know quite what's happening . . . it was kissing, sexual stimulation, and then just falling apart."[6] The man compared the sense of shame he felt at that time to an experience he had when he was four years old and had been "caught" by a relative messing his pants. Boys usually don't have a social context for communicating this kind of information to others. As one researcher commented, "Imagine an American boy coming to the breakfast table exclaiming, 'Mom, guess what? I had my first wet

dream last night. Now I'm a man.'"[7] In contrast, a study of semenarche in Nigeria indicated the majority of boys interviewed reported telling someone (father or friends) about their first ejaculation.[8]

As if these first experiences of puberty weren't enough to deal with, most people have their first experience of sexual intercourse during the years of adolescence (in the United States, the average age is 15.8).[9] Such events rarely measure up to teenagers' expectations. More commonly, the experience of first sex with another person involves awkwardness, vulnerability, confusion, and sometimes even coercion. This is especially true for women. In one study, nearly one in twenty women reported being forced into their first sexual intercourse in adolescence, and almost one-third of the respondents reported that they didn't want it to happen when it did.[10] One high school sophomore described her own troubled first experience of sexual intercourse with her boyfriend: "I felt as though I had to conform to everything he said that, you know, things that a girl and a guy were supposed to do, so like, when the sex came, like, I did it without thinking . . . I just did it because, maybe because he wanted it, and I was always like tryin' to please him and like, he was real mean, mean to me, now that I think about it. I was like kind of stupid, cause like I did everything for him and he just treated me like I was nothing."[11]

While glorified by the media as an event that is "cool," "hot," or "awesome," the experience of sex for many adolescents is more often a mixture of complex and conflicting emotions, as is much of the rest of their life. This is largely because the emotional centers deep inside the brain—collectively termed the *limbic system*—click into high action at puberty, while the frontal lobes, those areas of the neocortex behind our forehead that govern reserve, reflection, and restraint, don't mature until nineteen or twenty years old or later.[12] This means that from at least the age of twelve to twenty, the average teenager's brain has its emotional gas pedal pressed to the floor while its brakes haven't yet been completely installed![13] This helps to explain the quickly shifting moods of adolescence. In some ways, the emotional volatility of early childhood reasserts itself during the teenage years. This can be quite a problem because it's one thing for a toddler to throw a tantrum and quite another for that same quality of rage to be expressed through the physical frame of a two-hundred-pound sixteen-year-old boy. People can get hurt, and they do, in fact. By age group, adolescents

have the highest rates of violent crime, auto accidents, homicide, and suicide. They are also at high risk for assault, rape, panic attacks, eating disorders, substance abuse, serious depression, and schizophrenia—a disorder that was originally called *dementia praecox* (precocious dementia) because it started so often in adolescence and early adulthood.

DIVING INTO THE UNCONSCIOUS

One Jungian analyst even suggested that the entire experience of adolescence might itself represent a mild form of transient schizophrenia.[14] Moving out of the happy-go-lucky world of the pony lover and stamp collector, the ex-child starts to slip into the simmering, moody darkness of the subconscious. As we've noted, there is a kind of regression to earlier states of development going on here. It almost seems as if the adolescent is stopping for a period on his journey toward adulthood to see if there is anything that he has left behind before venturing forth into the unknown. And so he begins to drop some of the tasks that he had been doing so diligently during late childhood. He goes back—some would say he's pushed—into early childhood and infancy in an attempt to heal unresolved emotional conflicts, face powerful instinctual drives, and search for and gather up those long hidden seeds of a deeper authentic self to carry forward into adult life.

This is not, as a rule, a pretty process.[15] It is comparable to a descent into the belly of the whale, a trek into the dragon's lair, or a flight into the eye of the hurricane. It's a dangerous journey where the adolescent can be maimed or destroyed by his own uncontrolled instincts, or by his encounters with the archetypal fragments of his early childhood and infancy. Once again he has to face up to, and this time finally triumph over, the monsters and deities of his own personal odyssey, including Circe, the lustful seductress; Scylla, the devouring sea monster; Poseidon, the god of earthquakes; and a pantheon of other monumental images from his first few years of life. Like Odysseus, the adolescent has to descend into Hades and encounter the ghosts of the past in order to return home as a hero.

There's a magical, almost magnetic, allure to these larger-than-life images for the adolescent. That's one of the reasons why adolescents get so caught up in the occult, sorcery games, myth and legend, mystical philosophies, religious cults, and psychedelic or mood drugs that create

altered states of consciousness. Adolescents are hungry for “merger states”; for feelings of “at-one-ment” where they can directly experience these early emotions and fantasies on a grand scale. One can see the earmarks of this archetypal longing in many aspects of adolescent culture, from the names of rock groups (Black Sabbath, Nirvana), to the terms used for street drugs (Angel Dust, Superman), to the fantasy role-playing games teens like to engage in (Dungeons & Dragons, Tunnels & Trolls). These names hint at the images that have been unconsciously controlling them throughout their childhood, that threaten to keep them in a state of infantile dependence, and from which they wish ultimately to break free.

In some cases, these threats stem directly from the nuclear family. Parents who themselves have not grown up or who have not moved ahead to create their own uniquely individual and interesting lives are among the worst instances of the kinds of internalized forces that seek to restrain the adolescent from emotionally advancing into adulthood. In Arthur Miller’s classic American play *Death of a Salesman*, a frustrated middle-aged Willy Loman cheats on his wife in a Boston hotel room only to receive a surprise visit from his adolescent son Biff. The son is so shaken up by his father’s infidelity and hypocrisy that he refuses to take a make-up summer school course that would insure a college athletic scholarship. This pivotal decision, born of his feelings about his father’s bad faith, keeps Biff from going to college and having a successful young adulthood. As psychoanalyst Frances Wickes once pointed out, “The father who is still a child looking to his wife for motherly care, or who has never thought for himself nor acted from individual conviction, or who treats his children, especially his daughters, as emotional toys, can be of no real help when the child is reaching out for greater psychological maturity. There is also that eternally adolescent type of mother who not only keeps young for her children but who tries to keep her children young for herself . . . The daughter is still kept the little girl; the son perhaps begins to assume the place of the youthful lover.”[16] In each case, something unresolved in the parent serves as a kind of reverse wind tunnel, sucking the adolescent back into a state of unconscious dependence and immaturity. One of the central projects of adolescence is to achieve liberation from these regressive forces by standing up to their full force and fury, while at the same time maintaining a sense of individual identity in the face of these dangers. It’s at

such times that the adolescent can pluck the jewel of selfhood from beneath the dragon's lair.

FINDING THE RITE PASSAGE INTO ADULTHOOD

Becoming liberated from the past, however, is no easy task and the adolescent needs to have help in stepping across the chasm. For that reason, cultures have evolved rituals of initiation, or "rites of passage" where adults who themselves had been initiated come together to help the younger generation across the threshold. In Homer's *The Odyssey*, Telemachus, the adolescent son of Odysseus, goes through his own turbulent rite of passage when he fights alongside his father to kill the suitors besieging his home. Traditional rites of passage, while sometimes terribly brutal and politically incorrect by today's standards, are at least to be appreciated for their ingenuity and their sheer diversity of ways to promote "adult making." Of particular interest are those early rites of prehistoric origin from aboriginal Australia and certain parts of Africa that are still in evidence today despite modernization.

At the beginning of such rites, initiates are often separated from their mothers. The mother is sometimes told that a son or daughter is dying or being devoured by a divine monster. This signifies the end of childhood and the leaving behind of the old mother-child relationship. Then the adolescents are often put into some form of seclusion. Females who have just started to menstruate may be secluded in cabins or huts for a significant period of time. Males are often taken to open spaces where they may lie down in a pit representing a coffin and symbolically die to their old life. The pit also represents the womb where they are to be born into a new life as an adult. Sometimes the youths are smeared with red, white, blue, or black substances symbolizing blood, semen, or feces to indicate that they really have died to this life and gone back to the state of the newborn. Females may be placed in womblike cages, made fat and pale, and massaged like babies. Males may hear horrible sounds, or be shown masked figures said to be their ancestors who have come to "kill" them.

Both males and females are often subject to painful mutilations during these rituals. Teeth may be knocked out, subincisions made in the body, hair torn out, poisonous itching plants rubbed in the skin, or stinging ants released over their bodies. The boys may be circumcised and the girls may

have their clitoris or labia removed, all without anesthetic. In some cases, there may be a ritual defloration of the girls by a priest or outsider. Sometimes feats of endurance are also required, including fasting, not sleeping for long periods of time, killing animals or human enemies, or being thrown into the sea and told to swim back to shore. Toward the end of these rituals, novices are usually taught the spiritual heritage of the tribe, shown the secret mysteries of the culture accessible only to male or female initiates (the two kinds of rituals are always kept separate), and given something tangible by the elders such as a piece of jewelry, a belt, or a new name to signify their newfound status as full-fledged members of the culture. The rites may conclude with a collective feast or celebration to welcome the initiated youth back into the community.

Such rites of passage, seen in terms of modern psychology, capitalize on the regressive tendencies of adolescents and their vulnerability to life-and-death scenarios by taking initiates directly back to early developmental states where they undergo a psychic death and rebirth only to reemerge as transfigured humans in a transformed world. In the course of this process, which encompasses both *adapting* and *remembering,* the initiates regress back to the instinctual and spiritual worlds of prebirth, birth, and infancy, and retrieve from these primitive and transpersonal realms the sacred treasures that hold the secret to their very identity.

Of particular importance in many of these rites of passage is the *collective* journey back to the beginnings of time and to the primordial source of all existence. Initiates frequently engage in rituals that reenact the origin myths of their culture. During these cosmic dramas they encounter the Ancestors who gave birth to the universe. They themselves take part directly in the spiritual renewal of their culture and of the cosmos itself. Referring to male Australian aboriginal rites, religious historian Mircea Eliade observed, “Initiation recapitulates the sacred history of the world. And through this recapitulation, the whole world is sanctified anew. The boys die to their profane condition and are resuscitated in a new world; for, through the revelation they have received during their initiation, they can perceive the world as a sacred work, a creation of the Gods.”[17] Hence, the passage from childhood to adulthood in these ancient societies is seen as a spiritual journey, and to cross the threshold, contact must first be made with the cosmic ground of all being that defines that culture’s very existence.

ADOLESCENTS WITHOUT GUIDES

The types of conditions intended to help children reach adulthood described above are almost entirely unavailable to adolescents growing up in contemporary culture. One could argue that this is a good thing because modern teenagers avoid the harsh suffering inherent in many of these rites. After all, not everybody made it through these rituals to the other side. There were many deaths from starvation, infection, exposure, and trauma for those not fit enough to join the club.[18] The problem, however, is that today's adolescents for the most part lack *any* meaningful contact with adults who can show them the way to maturity. According to psychologist and adolescent researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Most of the time, adolescents are either alone (26%) or with friends (34%) and classmates (19%). Very little time is spent in the company of adults. The typical American adolescent spends only about five minutes a day alone with his or her father—not nearly enough to transmit the wisdom and values that are necessary for the continuation of a civil society. Less time is spent in a one-on-one interaction with a teacher or other adult."[19]

Even when adults *are* present, the adolescent may be emotionally and mentally removed from the scene, as Csikszentmihalyi himself found out when, in an experiment, he equipped high school students with beepers that would go off randomly throughout the school day. Students were instructed, whenever they heard the beeper go off, to write down whatever they were thinking at that precise moment. Twenty-seven students were beeped who were attending a high school lecture on Genghis Khan's invasion of China in the thirteenth century. Only two students were thinking about China. One student was thinking about what he'd eaten at a Chinese restaurant a few weeks before, and the other student wondered why men in old China wore their hair in ponytails. No one was paying attention to what the teacher was saying.[20]

Granted, it can be argued that there *are* fragments of the old rites of passage still available to some adolescents in contemporary society. A few examples include the school prom, high school graduation, religious coming-of-age ceremonies such as the Jewish bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah, and community events like the *quinceañera* or fifteenth birthday celebration of a Hispanic female. But because most adolescents, by and large, no longer have adults helping them make it through wholly integrated culturally

sponsored rituals of initiation, they often have to make up their own rites of passage. And the results are often disastrous. This unconscious need to be initiated can help explain some of the more dangerous activities of adolescents that grab headlines and puzzle and disturb adults. These include binge drinking, drug use, gang-related violence, hate crimes, and high-speed auto chases. Girls may engage in unsafe sex rituals, including a variation on the Russian roulette theme where the initiate must have sex with multiple partners known to be infected with HIV. Boys may have to earn their way into a gang through injuring or even killing a rival gang member.[21]

Each of these destructive behaviors separates adolescents from their childhood life of innocence and regresses them back into the swirling maelstrom of infantile thrills and chills. Unfortunately, however, they don't bring teens back up from these earlier developmental levels as newly transformed individuals who are then incorporated into a community of mature adults. If these rite of passage victims aren't destroyed by illness, accident, murder, or suicide from these makeshift rituals, they often remain isolated as incomplete individuals or less-than-whole members of their group, gang, or cult, and stagnate, perhaps in prison, slums, or mental health facilities, for the rest of their lives.

I was one of the lucky ones. When I was eighteen I took LSD and had a nightmarish encounter with my unconscious that culminated in my incarceration in a psychiatric ward. I remember being put in a half nelson by a white-clad attendant as I was separated from my parents in a hospital corridor, and isolated in a bare room with bars on the windows (a good thing, too, for I believed at the time that I could have floated safely down from the seventh-story window). My do-it-yourself rite of passage included a *separation* from childhood (I literally felt ripped away from my parents), and a period of *isolation* in a locked room where I existed in a kind of nether state. But it lacked any sort of *incorporation* ritual where I was ceremonially welcomed into society as a mature adult. Instead, I was knocked out with Thorazine, asked where I got the LSD from by a strange-looking psychiatrist when I woke up, and discharged after three days without any follow-up.[22]

Without the benefit of traditional rites of passage, adolescents face incredible challenges in making their way safely and securely into adulthood. That so many are able to do so in spite of the obstacles suggests

that there are protective and guiding factors available to adolescents in today's fragmented society. Much of the impetus for growth into early adulthood comes from meaningful contact with adults who have in one way or another made their own successful journey across the great divide from childhood to adulthood. It seems as if adolescents in the post-rites-of-passage world are able to grow (the Latin word *adolescere* means just that, "to grow up") essentially by patching together images of positive adulthood from wherever they can find them: from inspiring teachers, healthy relatives, vital neighbors, caring friends of the family, trustworthy clergy, and a host of other positive role models gathered from contemporary society, as well as from past history.[23]

Adolescents usually create this mosaic of maturity quite haphazardly and casually, for example, in weekly conversations with a school counselor, or via an informal apprenticeship with a local community artist or mechanic, or through travel with a favorite adult relative. Janet Sayers recorded the recollections of a man in his twenties thinking back to his troubled teens and the positive impact made by two older men: "They were near enough to gods . . . Nat is a formidable character in everything—he seems to be inscrutable, ineffable. He's traveled the world once or twice. He's got an extraordinary IQ, and a near photographic memory. And he's an artist . . . And when I met them I thought they saw me to be young and aspiring, but in somewhat of a quagmire, with various indoctrinated views of what was good, and what was bad . . . And slowly but surely they tended to lift [me] out of it . . ."[24]

In one way or another, older mature individuals provide stepping stones to adulthood by offering adolescents trust, special tools and skills, or simply by providing them with the gift of believing in themselves. As psychotherapist Mary Pipher writes, "I often use the North Star as a metaphor [with my adolescent girl clients]. I tell clients: 'You are in a boat that is being tossed around by the winds of this world. The voices of your parents, your teachers, your friends and the media can blow you east, then west, then back again. To stay on course you must follow your own North Star, your sense of who you truly are. Only by orienting north can you chart a course and maintain it, only by orienting north can you keep from being blown all over the sea.'"[25]

A New Kind of Thinking

There's something else going on within the adolescent that helps her into the adult world. It's a newfound capacity to think in an entirely new way. Starting at about age eleven, kids move into what cognitive researcher Jean Piaget called the stage of formal operational thinking.[26] Now they're able to engage in purely abstract thinking. They can create whole sets of mental operations and manipulate them in their mind without reference to the real world. For example, they're now capable of doing algebraic operations (x = y + z) without having to worry about how these variables relate to some particular group of things like "ice cream cones" or "television sets." They're also able to create hypotheses like mature scientists and test them systematically. Give a nine-year-old child several different lengths of string and different weights to attach to them, and ask her to create a pendulum. Then ask her to tell you which of the following variables affects the pendulum's rate of swing: length of string, weight of ball, or force of push. The child will likely engage in a trial-and-error search for the right answer. Do the same experiment with a fourteen-year-old and you're apt to find her systematically testing each variable, for example, by varying each weight while keeping the other conditions constant, trying different lengths of string, and so on, until discovering the influential factor (answer: the string's the thing).

This ability to think logically, systematically, and abstractly can be taken to a *very* high level of sophistication in adolescence. A review of some of the greatest mathematical and scientific ideas in history reveals that teenagers made many of these discoveries. Mathematicians who did original work during their teen years include Blaise Pascal, Evariste Galois, Carl Friedrich Gauss, and John von Neumann, one of the pioneers of the computer revolution. Einstein got some of his original insights in physics as a high school student in Prussia and Switzerland. He would visualize what it would be like to race alongside a beam of light, or freefall in a sealed room in empty space, and through these "thought experiments" came up with the first inklings for his special and general theories of relativity. These kinds of logical-mathematical explorations show up to a lesser degree in the daily musings of adolescents. Many kids in their teen years show an avid interest in computer languages and abstract logical games like chess and Go. Some also become quite excited about science fiction because this new kind of mind revels in an exploration of not merely what *is*, but what is

purely possible.[27] Consequently, their minds take off into explorations of alternate realities, space and time warps, parallel universes, and alien mutations.

This capacity to envision what is possible can also open them up to Utopian visions and attract them to political and social movements that reflect their newly formed ideals. It was as a thirteen-year-old that Frederick Douglass began to feel deeply the moral yoke of slavery and to seek the means of escaping it. It was at eighteen years of age that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin responded to the czar's hanging of his brother by becoming involved in radical politics. For millennia, governments have infamously relied upon the idealism of adolescents to stoke the fires of its war machines, even as this same transcendent function has motivated youth to put those fires out through peace activities such as those that occurred in the United States during the 1960s Vietnam protests. At the same time, the maturation of the higher brain functions that occurs in the teen years empowers adolescents with the capacity to engage in metathinking, or "thinking *about* thinking." This means they can begin to reflect on their own actions in a more dispassionate way. This is a faculty that proves to be extremely useful in helping them to modulate their turbulent emotional lives. Adolescents also start to entertain competing points of view as equally valid, which adds fuel to their arguments with peers and adults as they embrace unpopular opinions, relish controversial positions, and detach themselves from many of the conformist beliefs of their childhood years in religion and politics.

One of the most significant contributions of adolescence to the human life cycle, I believe, is their ability, like Hamlet, to sniff out the hypocrisy of the adults around them. The critical consciousness that accompanies this new kind of mind is often devastatingly accurate and quite passionate in pinpointing the weak points, inconsistencies, and lapses that characterize "business as usual" in the adult world. It's during adolescence that we often begin to employ satire, cynicism, skepticism, and irony in our assault upon the shortcomings of the status quo. This type of criticism, of course, is rarely welcomed by the surrounding adult community. It was while attending the Blessed Sacrament Convent School in New York City, for example, that satirist Dorothy Parker was expelled for insisting that the immaculate conception was a form of "spontaneous combustion."

THE SPIRITUAL WORLD OF ADOLESCENCE

It's as if the adolescent moves helicopter-like out of the world of fixed ideas and beliefs of childhood, and can now look down at the big picture and see all sorts of inconsistencies and incongruities in the scenery below. This wider and more complex view of existence sometimes brings with it a sense of disillusionment, and can even plunge the teen into a "dark night of the soul" where identity, significant goals, and the meaning of life are all put seriously in doubt. During such times, philosophical musings, existential angst, and a deep brooding like Hamlet's may precipitate a real crisis out of which a new creative, philosophical, religious, or spiritual outlook may ultimately emerge. American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, the originator of the modern conception of adolescence, even went so far as to suggest that to complete adolescence successfully, a person must undergo a transformation in which "the older, lower selfish self is molted and a new and higher life of love and service emerges." He suggested that "religious conversion is the most effective and natural vehicle of this transformation."[28] Sometimes this experience happens very quietly. In his autobiography, evangelist Billy Graham shares his story of his own conversion at the age of sixteen, which occurred during an invitation to accept Christ at a revival meeting. He wrote, "No bells went off inside me. I simply felt at peace."[29]

At other times, this process of *remembering* is shocking and disorienting. Such was the case with Joan of Arc, the French peasant girl who was inspired by God to lead the battle against the English in the Hundred Years War in the fifteenth century. According to the most famous version, ". . . when she was thirteen years of age, she had a voice from God to help her to know what to do. And on the first occasion she was much afraid. And this voice came about the hour of midday, in the summertime, in her father's garden . . . She heard the voice upon the right side, towards the church, and she rarely heard it without an accompanying brightness . . . And, after she had heard this voice upon three occasions, she understood that it was the voice of an angel."[30]

Contemporary Indian sage Ramana Maharshi provides an eastern version of adolescent spiritual awakening in his account of what happened to him when he was seventeen years old: "It was about six weeks before I left Madura [his home town] for good that the great change in my life took place. It was quite sudden. I seldom had any sickness, and on that day there

was nothing wrong with my health, but a sudden violent fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it . . . The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally . . . 'Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying?'" Maharshi proceeded to lie down on the ground as if dead, and continued this inquiry until finally realizing: "So I am Spirit transcending the body . . . it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on."[31] Two months after this incident, he moved to a sacred mountain north of his home and began to teach his method of "self-inquiry" to spiritual seekers, continuing his work there until his physical death more than fifty years later.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's classic poem "Renascence" provides a stunning lyrical account of spiritual transformation in late adolescence. Written when she was nineteen, this initially quiet pastoral poem quickly crescendos to a climactic revelation: "And reaching up my hand to try / I screamed to feel it touch the sky / I screamed, and—lo!—Infinity / Came down and settled over me." In Millay's poem, after this cosmic epiphany the young narrator is buried "full six feet under ground" and then blasted into rebirth by a torrential downpour of rain, where she emerges finally able to see the world with newly transformed eyes: "The world stands out on either side / No wider than the heart is wide / Above the world is stretched the sky,—/ No higher than the soul is high."[32] Standing at the bridge between the limiting world of childhood and the scary expansiveness of adulthood, the adolescent, finally revitalized by such a revelation, moves forward into a new life where the boundaries seem to be set only by her own boundless energies. It's to this new adventure, the story of young adulthood, that we now turn in the next chapter.

THE GIFT OF ADOLESCENCE: PASSION

If there's one thing you can say about teenagers, it's that they're *passionate.* They're passionate about their clothes, their music, their love interests, their friends, and their ideals. The biochemical tide that surges through their brains and bodies during puberty virtually ensures that ardor and zeal will express themselves in some tangible way between the ages of thirteen and

twenty. We often view the passionate intensity of adolescence with worry and even alarm. We remember what happened to Romeo and Juliet when they got carried away by their emotions. We know that strong feelings like envy, fear, anger, and jealousy can wreak havoc on the lives of teens and those around them. We heave a sigh of relief when the brain's frontal lobes finally mature and rein in unruly passions at the end of adolescence.

But we need to remember that passions have their beneficial side as well. The dancer Martha Graham was fourteen years old when she saw her first ballet performance in Los Angeles and was seized with a great passion to dance for the rest of her life. As an adolescent, Richard Wagner was transformed when he heard a female singer during a performance of the opera *Fidelio*. He wrote a letter to her wherein he dedicated his entire life to music, delivered it to her hotel room, and ran out into the street in a mad delirium. In the teen years, adolescents regress back to the kind of passionate intensity they experienced in infancy and early childhood, but now they've acquired a number of skills and abilities which they can use to direct these passions into positive social goals. Thus, it's now possible for them to pour their fiery feelings into music, dance, science, art, sports, journalism, and a host of other productive channels.

In adulthood, we tend to lose this fervor as we get drawn into the practical contingencies of daily living. Too often, we become detached and passive in our attitude toward life. To balance this tendency, we need to recapture some of our old adolescent passion. This renewed fire can spark our close relationships to new heights of intimacy. It can revitalize our work by motivating us to put energy into projects that we feel strongly about. Or, alternatively, our passions can heighten the need to find a new career that engages our resources in a more dynamic way. The passions of adolescence can also stir greater involvement in the community, prodding us to fight for political, moral, or ethical causes that lead to the betterment of society. Ultimately, this vibrant energy of adolescence can shake us to the core and provide the creative fuel for a new and better way of life. In order to fan the dying embers of our forgotten teenage passions, however, we need to view adolescence, and the adolescents in our lives, with a new attitude. We need to acknowledge the important contribution of their youthful zeal to the collective well-being of humanity. We also need to remember what filled us with passion during our own teen years and integrate some of that zest into our current lives. Recognizing and nurturing our own hidden passions helps

ensure that this vital gift from adolescence will reawaken our untapped creative potentials and rouse the sleeping centers of our soul.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT ADOLESCENCE

FOR YOURSELF

- Put together a collection of favorite songs from your adolescent years (e.g., download them from the Internet) and, after listening to them, write down the feelings, moods, and thoughts that come to you about that period in your life.
- Create a time line of your adolescence (thirteen to nineteen), putting in key events that affected you in a significant way (romances, rites of passage, traumatic and ecstatic events, travels, special projects).
- Pick out a creative activity that you used to do as an adolescent but stopped doing in adulthood, and begin doing it again (e.g., acting in musicals, painting, reading Russian novels, writing poetry, playing tennis).

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Along with other adults, help create meaningful rites of passage ceremonies with your own adolescents or the adolescent sons or daughters of friends or family members.
- Spend quality time with an adolescent who is going through a difficult time (your own or a friend's or family member's). Suggestions include taking walks, going to public events, engaging in projects of special interest to the teenager and, most importantly, listening carefully to what she has to say.
- Provide an unmotivated adolescent with resources, materials, or experiences to engage his expanding mind. Examples might include a computer, software, books, music, games, or travel opportunities.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Contribute financially to a local community teen center.
- Volunteer to help tutor or counsel a troubled teen in your community.
- Pick a specific social problem related to adolescence and work in your community to help eradicate it. Examples include gang violence,

teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, school dropouts, school violence, eating disorders, substance abuse, or suicide prevention.

CHAPTER 8

Early Adulthood

BUILDING AN INDEPENDENT LIFE

It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection, uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted. The charm of adventure sweetens that sensation, the glow of pride warms it; but then the throb of fear disturbs it.

—CHARLOTTE BRONTË, *JANE EYRE*[1]

The story is a familiar one. Starry-eyed young person leaves home to win fame, fortune, and romance in the wide world. Life does not cooperate with her plans. On the way, she encounters much unanticipated difficulty. Finally, after a long series of adventures and misadventures, now older and wiser, she concludes that life is not the bowl of cherries she had imagined it to be in her youth and settles down to a more sober and practical existence.

World literature teems with variations on this basic scenario of early adult life. Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre leaves an abusive boarding school in search of a better life and finds it as a governess when she falls in love with her employer, Mr. Rochester. But then everything goes up in flames and she has to settle for far less as a nurse-wife to her crippled ex-lover. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister travels through Germany, supposedly to discharge family business, but actually spends most of his time with a troupe of traveling actors. He struggles with conflicts about whether to live passionately as an artist or reasonably as a businessman. Finally, someone he trusts tells him that he has no talent as an actor and he reluctantly agrees

and settles down with his long-lost son, his apprenticeship complete. Ralph Ellison's unnamed protagonist in the novel *Invisible Man* innocently leaves a black college in the South to develop himself in New York City, only to encounter such savage discrimination, violence, and betrayal that by the end of the book he is living underground as a fugitive in the city's sewer system. Each of these narratives is an example of a *bildungsroman*—a novel of character formation chronicling the growth of an individual from childhood to maturity.[2] These plots highlight what is the essential task of early adult development: to leave the familiar world of family, parents, community, and school—the chrysalis of the first eighteen to twenty years of life—and go off and try to make something of oneself in a world that puts all sorts of constraints on this urge to take wing and fly.

THE LOST GENERATION

Researchers have devoted less attention to this stage of life (ages twenty to thirty-five) than to just about any other period of human development. This is rather surprising, given the fact that early adulthood is the time when most people marry and have children, and when lifelong habits and attitudes toward work and career are formed. Perhaps this neglect occurs because young adults don't require the intensive nurturing of the earlier stages of development, and they aren't plagued by the aging processes of the later stages. In fact, this is the healthiest time of life.[3] People in this age group have fewer colds, accidents, and allergies than they did in childhood. Visits to the doctor are lower than in later stages of life. Young adults are at their peak of muscular strength from ages twenty-five to thirty. Their manual dexterity is the most efficient, and their senses are the sharpest that they will ever be.[4]

But this is definitely a stage of life with unique problems of its own. Developmental psychologist Robert Havighurst characterized this time as the loneliest, most disorganized period of the life span.[5] In one study, more than half of the changes made by young adults up to age twenty-five from school to job, or job to job, involved floundering and unplanned decision making.[6] There is an emotional toll to this uncertainty. This age group has the highest rate of alcohol and drug abuse. Here you are in your twenties, thrown out into the big world with lots of demands put upon you. You may feel impelled to set up a household, find a mate, get a job, create a family,

or find a niche for yourself. But there's not much support or direction from the world on how to actually go about doing any of these things, nor a great backlog of personal experience, judgment, or wisdom to fall back on in making just the right choices. Add to this the fact that you are probably still grappling with unresolved problems and conflicts from earlier stages of development, and you see how becoming an adult might turn out to be quite a struggle![7] Even the tremendous physical health of early adulthood can turn out to be a drawback of sorts. Because young adults are so physically healthy and don't get immediate feedback from poor health habits, they may push the envelope and eat poorly, smoke, drink, and work long hours without much sleep, only to pay for these infractions later on in their lives.[8]

Part of the difficulty is that no one has adequately defined what it means to be an adult, or when this is actually supposed to begin. In world mythology, heroes attain maturity after they have slain dragons, married princes, or deposed imposters to the throne. In the real world, it's a little more complicated. There *are* legal definitions for when a person is allowed to drink, drive, vote, and marry, but these requirements vary from place to place. There's also a great deal of diversity in the ways that people become adult. Some people leave home at fifteen or sixteen and get a job, a wife, and kids before they're twenty. Others stay in school until their early thirties and only then start to think about these sorts of commitments. As one sociologist put it: "A twenty-three-year-old may have a partner but no job, a child but no partner, be a student and living with parents, be a student and married, have a job but be living with parents; they may have no job, no partner, no child and be living with parents, but still feel adult."[9]

Perhaps the most internally satisfying response to the question of when adulthood starts is to recall the moment when you started to *feel like an adult* for the first time. Yale psychologist Daniel J. Levinson expressed it this way: "Once you can say in a meaningful way, 'it's my life, not my parents,' you have reached psychological adulthood."[10] This moment can occur during even the most banal events of daily life. One woman observed, "I remember the moment when I felt like I wasn't a kid anymore. When I was twenty-three, I moved into my own apartment. The first time I listened to my refrigerator hum, I got this fleeting thing in my stomach. This was my refrigerator in my apartment. Sometime that first week, I remember getting up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and I got really excited because it was my own bathroom."[11] A twenty-six-year-old man

living in Chicago wrote in his blog about his move from Texas to Illinois four years earlier: “I packed everything into a U-Haul trailer and was sad to know that every one of my possessions fit into that little thing. I drove north with the theme from *Perfect Strangers* playing in my head, and I felt like an adult for the first time in my life. There’d be no family to help me, no comfortable job, no spacious apartment, and no safety net of any kind in Chicago. I’d also have to find all new friends.”[12]

Because modern society doesn’t have carefully worked out rites of passage for young people, the line between childhood and adulthood is a lot fuzzier than it used to be. Psychiatrist Kenneth Kenniston has suggested an intermediate stage between adolescence and adulthood called *youth*, where an individual attempts to work out a resolution between his own ideals and the demands of the world. Finding this balance is difficult because there’s always the pressure to become a cog in society’s machine, or on the other hand to refuse to compromise at all and retreat into isolation as a social misfit.[13] For many people, it simply takes more time to become an adult. This is especially true for highly creative individuals who discover that their own gifts and abilities may be in conflict with the values of the *adapter* culture around them. It is also true for *rememberers* who reconnected to their spiritual depths in late adolescence, and who are struggling to discover ways to integrate those experiences into the complexities of modern life in early adulthood.

When I was nineteen, after having hitchhiked around Europe the previous six months, I went through a kind of Dark Night of the Soul when I returned to my studies at Carleton College. Over the course of four months—from January to April 1971—I experienced a kind of cosmic terror, where I felt like I’d lost all my moorings to anything I’d previously known to be true. Gradually, I found myself transformed from a gloomy and insecure agnostic into a political activist and inspired mystic who embraced the unity of all religions. During the next couple of years, after having dropped out of Carleton, I struggled with how to bring my new intuitions about life into some sort of career focus. In my early twenties, I discovered that working with children allowed me to stay connected with my desire for social change and to my longings for the spiritual life. It was Maria Montessori’s work that gave me the spark to go back to school and study education—not as a Montessori teacher, but as an alternative school teacher embracing a wide range of innovative educational philosophies and

strategies. After finishing my bachelor's and master's degrees in my mid-twenties, I ended up teaching in two very traditional school systems in Canada and the United States. Just as with the characters in the novels that opened this chapter, I ultimately came to my own sobering conclusions about the hard facts of life, observing how education as a whole did not promote social change or spiritual expansion, but rather served to maintain the social sickness of the status quo, and suppress children's radiant vitality.

Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson used the term *moratorium* to describe the tentative, uncertain nature of this age, employing the word to describe a period of time when a young person may not commit directly to life, yet be inwardly working out the conditions that will make it possible for him eventually to do so. Erikson's concept came out of his own personal experience as a young adult. Never a good student, Erikson graduated from high school in Germany at eighteen and didn't know what to do with his life. He wandered through the Black Forest and walked along the shores of Lake Constance where for many months he spent time reading, sketching, and putting his thoughts down in a notebook. Eventually he enrolled in art school, became restless and left, studied at another art school, exhibited a few of his etchings and woodcuts, and then gave up art entirely and moved to Florence where he wandered through the streets and hills of Tuscany. Finally, when he was twenty-five, he received a letter from a friend inviting him to come to Vienna to teach the children of a mother who was being analyzed by Sigmund Freud. He went to Vienna, trained as a Montessori teacher, began work with Anna Freud, and eventually became the world's leading child psychoanalyst, and the creator of the most popular and highly regarded theory of the life span in the Western world.[14]

In Erikson's case the culture served as an important support during his wanderings. The Germans have a folk tradition that allows young people to wander as artists without committing to a fixed lifestyle (a period called the *Wanderjahr*), and even have a word for a young creative student who has his doubts about things (*Künstler* or "artist"). Had Erikson gone through his restless early twenties in today's more medicalized and pragmatic society, one wonders whether he might not have been given a diagnosis, some Prozac, and a job employment application.

LAUNCHING INTO LIFE

For most people, the process of quitting home is not so romantic, and is characterized by a slower process of moving out into the world—or *launching*—in a series of more predictable steps. Women leave home earlier than men, usually to marry, but men are more likely to return home after a "false start" at independence. Roughly half of all individuals return home after their initial leaving, a phenomenon that's been called by sociologists "boomerang children" and by comics "umbilical whiplash." The reasons for coming back home may include the inability to earn an income sufficient to establish a household, the failure of a "starter marriage" (a marriage of short duration usually begun during the twenties that has serious flaws from the start), or simply feeling psychologically unready to live on one's own. As one twenty-three-year-old man still living at home explained, "Where else can I get free rent, home cooking, cable TV, and free laundry? I'd be a fool to live anywhere else."[15]

The typical pattern is to leave home for a year or two, return home for two or three years, and then leave for the final time. Thus, launching into adulthood takes on average four and a half years.[16] But it's perfectly normal for many young adults—especially those in African-American or Latin-American cultures—to stay at home until their mid-twenties or later. As one thirty-year-old Latina put it ". . . both my parents are Peruvian. It's common to move out when you are married, but before then it doesn't really make any sense and really isn't accepted. My parents live close to the city and I have always worked in or around the city, so financially it didn't seem like it made sense to move out until I was married. . . . I feel like I am making a wise and responsible decision. . . . My parents have always respected the fact that I've decided to stay and save money and that I honor our culture and their wishes."[17]

On the path to self-sufficiency many young adults seek transitional ways to help them complete the split with parents: joining the military, going away for school, entering the Peace Corps, doing missionary work for a religious organization, or working as a tutor or domestic for a family. But by the mid-thirties, only around 10 percent of children are still living with their parents, often as individuals with disabilities.

As they strive to break with the past and move into a hopeful future, young adults during the time of launching are often driven by a desire to achieve great things. They often carry an inner image of themselves as

successful adults, a phenomenon that Daniel Levinson calls “the Dream.”[18] This Dream may be a vague feeling of living in the future as an active homemaker, a loving mother, a caring father, a wealthy businessperson, or a pillar of the community. Or it may involve very specific and ambitious plans to become a rock star by one’s mid-twenties or to conquer the literary world by age thirty-five. Sometimes this image of oneself comes in the form of a “call” (the word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means “to call”). The protagonist in Goethe’s novel wonders: “What man in the whole world would not find his situation intolerable if he chooses a craft, an art, indeed any form of life, without experiencing an inner calling?”[19] I remember my own “call” to become a teacher of children while walking past the Smithsonian Astrophysical Laboratory on Garden Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1972. It was like a physical feeling of warmth that glided down from the heavens and lodged itself in my chest. Another celestial call was reported by a woman who was quoted in the book *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*, by Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner: “It was this huge flash of light, like a message in the sky. I had a cold, and I was totally stressed because I was trying to look for a new job in computers, and I went home to take a quick nap. When I woke up, the thought that was in my head was that if I were independently wealthy, I would sit around and decorate houses all the time. And that’s when it hit me that decorating is actually a career. I just knew that was my passion. I’m just now having a dream for the first time in my life, so I’m not about to give it up now.”[20]

The call to a career, however, is not something that happens to everyone, and the situation for women is particularly problematic. As researchers Judy Levinson and Daniel Levinson observed, “A person cannot afford the luxury of a Dream if she is totally occupied with survival in a barren environment or with conformity to a life scenario that leaves no room for personal choice—a widespread experience of young women.”[21] Many women feel pulled into marriage and family responsibilities at an early age while at the same time experiencing a desire to explore career options that have opened up for females in the past few decades. Yet they are frustrated by a lack of support in a still largely male-driven world. At the same time, both men and women find their personal dreams of adult achievement contaminated to some degree by the voices of their parents (“My son is going to be a lawyer”) or by society at large (“Show me the

money"). As one of the Levinsons' research subjects reported, "I had no image of a successful single woman who had happily made her career the center of her life. My image was that she had to be cold-hearted, she had to be grasping, she had to be cruel, she had to be embittered, frustrated, wishing she had done anything just to be sitting by the fireside knitting in the evening with children."[22]

Still, the Dream serves to propel many young adults into the world to seek their fame, happiness, or fortune. And it is often in the world of *work* where these expectations are initially hammered out for better or worse. In work, a young adult can begin to experience a sense of *achievement,* a sense of being somebody that makes a real difference and who plays a significant role in adult life. One man described his job working for a political party starting at the age of nineteen: "I was paid $6oo a month. I felt like the richest guy in the world. I woke up each day so excited because I got to work for something I believed in so strongly. I pushed myself as hard as I could to get up as early as possible and leave work as late as I could. I loved my job and my life. I remember getting my paychecks and wanting to frame them because I was so proud that someone found me valuable enough to pay me."[23]

Too often, however, the initial work experiences of young adults hardly produce any real sense of accomplishment. In the first place, no one has usually helped these individuals discover what their innate talents are, nor what sort of career direction would best match their abilities. Consequently, many young adults begin their work life (and also sadly end it) in jobs totally out of sync with their natural proclivities. To add to the disappointment, most initial work experiences for young adults are low-paying part-time and entry-level jobs that involve routine work for bosses that care little about shepherding young talent toward greatness. It seems as if this stage of early adulthood does most of the *grunt work* of the world: computing, filing, hauling, lifting, schlepping, and whatever else anyone more senior than themselves can avoid doing and pawn off on these hapless young lackeys. As a twenty-four-year-old researcher at an economic consulting firm described it: "We're like the kids downstairs. We don't get many responsibilities because we're all thought of as lesser people rather than equal coworkers."[24]

One key to surviving in this kind of environment involves taking advantage of training or educational opportunities. This is a time for

learning new skills, for jumping through hoops, for acquiring new competencies, and for achieving advanced degrees or certifications that will qualify one for more highly respected and better paid positions. The nation's post-secondary schools and training centers act as an important broker in this movement toward greater stability and satisfaction in the workplace. Higher education—that is, beyond high school—in early adulthood correlates to higher income, better job satisfaction, and less risk of getting Alzheimer's disease later in life.[25]

Yet at the same time, young adults tend to abandon the formalisms of school once they get out into the nitty-gritty world of the workplace. Workers taking inventory of goods in warehouses abandon schoolhouse algorithms in favor of quick approximations based on physical features. Merchants do error-free arithmetic using informal rules of thumb as guides. Even expert radiologists interpret X-rays in rough-and-ready ways never taught in medical school.[26] There seems to be a shift in the thinking processes of young adults, from the right/wrong, we/they, good/bad polarities of adolescence to a "whatever works" type of philosophy. Young adults begin to see that there are multiple viewpoints, and ultimately no one right answer to a problem, that it all depends upon the context in which the problem is embedded. Hence, there's a new kind of pragmatism that rules the field in early adulthood. It's even a bit amusing to observe how quickly the youthful idealism and cynicism of adolescence gives way to hard-edged realism once you've got to survive on your own steam. As Mark Twain observed: "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years."[27]

FINDING SOMEONE TO LOVE

Then there is the matter of mate selection. Erik Erikson considered this the single most important task of early adulthood: finding intimacy with another person, or losing out and living in isolation. Erikson's concept of intimacy, however, was somewhat limited. As he put it, intimacy meant "mutuality of orgasm, with a loved partner of the opposite sex with whom one is able and willing to share mutual trust, regulate cycles of work, procreation, and recreation so as to secure to the offspring their satisfactory development."[28] Unfortunately, this definition leaves out gay, lesbian,

bisexual, and transgender people, as well as heterosexual couples who practice nonsexual ways of being intimate, or who don't plan on having children.[29] In actuality, this stage is concerned with finding somebody to love. Young adults look for romance or friendship in singles bars, through online dating services, by partying, through personal ads, at chess clubs, science classes, political rallies, charity auctions, or just about anywhere else.[30]

Early adulthood is about looking for someone who is like us, who turns us on, or who completes us. And it's a hazardous project. If things don't go well, we could wind up with someone who infects us, projects on to us, or defects on us. If, on the other hand, we play our cards right (and with a little luck thrown in), we'll find the soul mate of our dreams. Most people end up with someone in between these two extremes and marry sometime during their early adulthood. In the United States, by the age of thirty-five, 72 percent of men and 83 percent of women have been married at least once (mean age for first marriages—women 25.0; men 26.7).[31] The marriage ceremony becomes a new rite of passage. For some, it's the first real marker event of full adulthood. Many of the rituals of marriage unconsciously practiced in modern society reveal deeper developmental messages rooted in traditional customs and beliefs. The wedding veil was initially placed on the bride to ward off malevolent spirits that might attack during this important spiritual event. The throwing of rice at the end of the ceremony symbolized fertility or good fortune and dates back to the agrarian Middle Ages when seed, corn, or grain was used instead of rice. The crossing of the threshold, where the groom lifts the bride off her feet on entering their new home, was an important symbol of passage into a new life; the threshold is the liminal space, neither in the old life, nor the new. As ethnographer Arnold van Gennep wrote, ". . . to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world . . ."[32]

THE PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF PARENTING

This new life brings with it all sorts of possibilities, and none are more important or more amazing than having children. Parenthood completes the life cycle. Once kids have been brought into this world, they start the whole process of growth and development all over again. And this can be a real shocker for parents, because now *they* are the larger-than-life forces that

they once beheld as infants and young children. *They* are now Scylla, Circe, or Poseidon in the eyes of the awe-stricken child. And it can be scary to be an archetype. Knowing that your three-year-old may see you on one of your bad days as a six-headed monster schlepping her way through the day can be just too much responsibility to bear. Usually, however, parents don't even have time to think about such mythological possibilities. Their activities are generally directed toward more pedestrian concerns such as getting up in the middle of the night to feed the baby, changing messy diapers, and kissing away tears. Later on, these responsibilities become more complex as parents seek the best ways of disciplining, schooling, and nurturing their kids. It's an awesome task, and Nature probably assigned this job primarily to young people because they don't yet have a really good grip on how difficult it is to be a good parent. They flock uncritically to their roles as mothers and fathers, thus keeping the species evolving.

It's been pointed out before, but deserves repeating, that here we have what is probably the most important role that anyone could ever play in life—being a parent—and there is no training, education, certificate, or degree required. As one expert noted, "biological parenthood may be achieved by stuporous drug addicts or disorganized psychotics who are out of contact with reality."[33] Anyone can apply. And yet, as we've seen in earlier chapters, the negative consequences of poor parenting ripple throughout the life cycle both backward in time and forward into the future. It must be remembered that becoming a parent brings up one's own old childhood traumas, which in turn get visited upon the next generation. Seeing your helpless or angry baby may trigger your own early fears or rages. Observing traits in baby that remind you of family members can provoke unconscious aggression or ambivalence. Giving your children what you never got from your own parents can help defuse some of this, but it also can play into your pathologies by saddling your child with an agenda she might not really want or need.

And yet Nature also seems to have provided some built-in protective mechanisms that endow most parents with a newfound sense of selflessness, which causes them to surrender many of their own personal goals in the interest of their kids.[34] We've already seen some of the biological processes that take place in mothers, helping to bond them to their children. Something on a smaller scale may also happen in fathers. In

one study, a majority of men regarded fatherhood as the single greatest shaper of their lives. Some saw it as a positive "jolt" to their life course, while others considered it more of a gentle evoker of their own latent personality traits of caring and giving.[35] One father looked back on his own violent adolescence and remarked on the change that fatherhood had made in his life: "Before, I was really rough and tumble on the street. My reputation is still known on the Westside. When I got around her [his newly born daughter] I would mellow. There's a lot of things I would have done if it wasn't for her. . . . I would've been in jail for murder, there's no doubt. I would have been dead, there's no doubt. . . . the reason that I wouldn't put in to effect the things I wanted to do was because I would think of her."[36]

NAVIGATING THE AGE THIRTY SHIFT

The end of the twenties brings with it a shift in perspective for many young adults. You've been going along for several years on your own, laboriously cobbling together a life structure made up of work experiences, social relationships, perhaps a marriage and some children. Suddenly the big 3-0 looms up ahead of you. Now the pressure of time begins to kick in. What have I done so far in my adult life? Has it been any good? Where do I go from here? Many individuals in their late twenties experience a crisis of sorts at this point. Daniel Levinson calls this the "Age 30 Transition." He says that most people at this time look back and see that the life they put together in their twenties is significantly flawed, and they become dissatisfied. His observations are borne out by the data. Fifty-seven percent of the males in his research study reported their lives as oppressive, incomplete, not going anywhere, or going in the wrong direction in their late twenties.[37] Ninety percent of the career women in his sample had moderate to severe crises around this time.[38] Similarly, an AFL-CIO poll revealed that young workers start their careers in their early twenties with great hope but are quickly disillusioned and by the time they reach thirty feel that they're getting a raw deal from the economy.[39] According to another survey, half of all high school graduates still have not found a steady job by age thirty.[40] There is also an increase in the number of divorces in the late twenties.[41]

On looking back at what they've done thus far, many young adults become frustrated that they haven't put more of *themselves* (their deeper authentic selves) into their lives.[42] In my own case, I went through an emotional crisis between twenty-eight and thirty, when I became disillusioned with the cult-like aspects of the spiritual group I had spent my entire twenties engaged with (followers of the Indian mystic Meher Baba). I had lost touch with the vital spiritual passion I had experienced during my early twenties, and saw how I'd used Meher Baba (a Persian word for "Compassionate Father") and certain leaders of the group as substitute parents who were now stifling me and who needed to be left behind.[43] Also, I was frustrated with my life as a school special education teacher because I wasn't developing children's creativity, as I'd hoped, but was forced by the school bureaucracy to focus on discipline and instruction based on kids' deficits rather than their abilities. By the age of thirty, I had quit both the spiritual group and my teaching job, moved to Berkeley, California, and begun anew as a writer and a teacher of college courses in human development.

Daniel Levinson suggests that biology may be behind the Age 30 Transition as the physical health and well-being that has been at its peak during the twenties begins its gradual decline around this time. It may also be a reaction to the trial and error nature of the previous ten years that causes many people in their late twenties to start getting serious about life. It was at age twenty-eight when Vincent van Gogh decided that trying to develop a career in the ministry wasn't the best use of his talents and he became a painter. William Faulkner wrote his first novel at age twenty-nine. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Anne Sexton was a depressed housewife at twenty-eight who thought that her only talent might be for prostitution. She began to work with a psychiatrist who suggested that she start writing, after diagnostic tests revealed that she had a great deal of untapped creative potential.[44] This is probably the first time in life when people start to hear the clock ticking and realize that there isn't an unlimited amount of time in which to accomplish their goals. The Age 30 Transition may also be the time when the *rememberer* resurfaces after several years of *adapting* to the conventional world. It was at the age of twenty-eight when William Wordsworth penned his famous lines in "Tintern Abbey," mourning the loss of youth but affirming a new spiritual outlook: "For I have learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes /

The still, sad music of humanity / . . . And I have felt / A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused."[45] It was at the age of twenty-nine when legend has it that the Buddha left his palace and royal privileges to seek spiritual enlightenment for the first time. At the age of thirty, according to the New Testament, Jesus began his ministry (Luke 3:23).

For most young adults in today's modern world, religious or spiritual interest, which tends to decline during the twenties (except for families concerned with providing church instruction for their kids), may increase in the late twenties, as people start looking within for clues about their purpose in life. At age twenty-eight, the highly rational Bertrand Russell, already famous for his scholarly contributions to the fields of philosophy and mathematics, had a deep spiritual experience triggered by the illness of a friend: "She [the friend] seemed cut off from everyone and everything by walls of agony and the sense of the solitude of each human soul suddenly overwhelmed me . . . the ground seemed to give way beneath me . . . Within five minutes, I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached . . . At the end of those five minutes, I had become a completely different person . . . Having for years cared for exactness and analysis, I found myself filled with semi-mystical feelings about beauty, and with an intense interest in children, and with a desire almost as profound as that of the Buddha to find some philosophy which should make human life endurable."[46] Although Russell eventually returned to his analytical stance toward life, he said that from that moment on he became interested in humanitarian issues and in living life at a deeper level.

As young adults move out of the Age 30 Transition, there's often a newfound sense of direction and purpose that helps to guide them through the next few years. Confucius said that at age thirty he "stood firm." You're no longer a novice or underling taking abuse from higher-ups, or at the very least, you're definitely fed up with this sort of treatment by now. You want to be taken seriously as a person in your own right and find your place as a full-fledged member of the adult community.

Having a mentor—someone who knows the ropes—can be a great help in navigating your way through this labyrinth. The word *mentor* actually comes from Homer's *The Odyssey.* When Odysseus left to fight in the

Trojan War, he left his good friend Mentor in charge of guiding his son, Telemachus. When Odysseus returned to Ithaca to fight the suitors in his home, he received help from Athena, who took the form of Mentor and protected him from the suitors' arrows. In the eighteenth century, the word began to be used for any person who served as a trusted friend, counselor, or guide. In the context of early adulthood, mentors are usually from eight to fifteen years older than their protégées and function in the role of a teacher, a sponsor, and/or a role model to be admired and emulated. They're able to open doors, offer encouragement in times of despair, and provide valuable advice not usually found in the "official" guidebooks to success. A woman reported her own experience at age twenty-three: "Lou was a good mentor. He took a 'push people off cliffs, and they'll learn to fly' approach. . . . He took risks in promoting me in the first place; he sponsored me, went to bat on salary and job level, sent me on business trips overseas."[47] Daniel Levinson says that a mentor's most crucial role is to support the realization of the Dream of their charges. He suggests that the mentor role is comparable to that of the "good enough" parent during childhood. The mentor believes in the young adult, shares in her vision for herself, and helps to create a space for working out a life structure that can contain that image.[48]

Early adulthood comes to an end as individuals complete their apprenticeships, find a niche in society, and begin to achieve their dreams or at least reconfigure them. Or alternatively, it ends when they settle for a watered-down version of their youthful aspirations, as did the characters from the novels cited at the beginning of this chapter. These developments seem to herald the true beginnings of maturity. Sadly, though, there are many people in their thirties, dogged by dysfunction from earlier stages of life, who are still searching for a place in society; individuals who have difficulty finding steady work, who struggle with substance abuse, who live in isolation or crawl from one failed relationship to another, or who are bedeviled by emotional or physical illnesses that keep them from functioning in the world. These are the Biff Lomans of the world. In the play *Death of a Salesman*, after Biff had sabotaged his own chances for success by refusing to take a summer school class in order to graduate from high school, he proceeded to drift around the country with no stable job or relationship, even going to jail once for stealing a suit. After returning home to try to face his unresolved issues with his father, at one point he turns to

his mother and says, “I just can’t take hold, Mom. I can’t take hold of some kind of a life.” Biff speaks for many young adults in their mid-thirties who face poverty, illness, unemployment, and despair. And the bad news for them is, with age forty looming just around the corner, it may not get any easier. We’ll turn to the story of midlife in the next chapter.

THE GIFT OF EARLY ADULTHOOD: ENTERPRISE

It takes a lot of work to navigate one’s way through early adulthood. This project involves leaving home, setting up a new residence, looking for work, finding friends, perhaps searching for a mate, maybe getting married, and then possibly having children who need to be brought up. Whew! One needs an enterprising spirit to make these sorts of things happen. Thus, the gift of early adulthood is best described by the quality of *enterprise.* Young people setting out at the beginning of adulthood are establishing a new business: the business of becoming themselves. This business requires a lot of initiative and ambition. It necessitates a willingness to try new things, make mistakes, and learn from one’s errors. Young adults have to learn how to sell themselves to the world without selling out. For the first time in their lives, they possess enough combined physical, emotional, and cognitive maturity to make a significant impact upon their surroundings. If the spirit of enterprise did not flow through their veins, society would likely suffer a sizeable loss of productivity in the work force, lack enough healthy individuals to take on the intensive job of raising children, and be without the youthful energies that infuse new life into rigid social structures.

Enterprise is a quality that we need to hold on to into our forties, fifties, and beyond. As we age, we continue to encounter new problems that require an enterprising spirit. In midlife, the need for a new career or a new life focus may force us to reach out into the world in a venturesome way. Even in retirement, our charitable work or other projects still require hustle and punch in order to have a major impact. In old age, we might be seeking to sum up our lives, establish a legacy, or create a meaningful work of art. Each of these tasks involves the necessity of picking ourselves up and marshalling enough diligent energy to make good things happen. To maintain this youthful quality of enterprise as older adults, we need to recall

the ambition and persistence we had in early adulthood: Remember the gumption it took to try to find a mate, get a job, create a family, or establish ourselves in some other way during this formidable time of person building. By recollecting and honoring our exuberance in early adulthood, we increase the odds of growth and expansion as we encounter new developmental challenges in each subsequent stage of life.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT EARLY ADULTHOOD

FOR YOURSELF

- Gather a group of friends together and talk about incidents in your lives when you realized that you were no longer children or adolescents but full-fledged adults.
- Write down what you felt was the "Dream"—your image of future adult achievement or accomplishment—that you set for yourself in early adulthood. Ask yourself whether you have (or currently are) realizing that Dream in adulthood.
- Make a list of adults who served as mentors or significant influences in your young adulthood. If possible, look one or more of them up and talk about old times and about where you are now in your life.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Informally serve as a mentor for a young adult who is in a "moratorium" period, that is, who is not yet situated in a suitable job or relationship but who is still searching to find a place for her own unique gifts in the world around her.
- Offer support and advice to a young couple struggling with their relationship. If necessary, refer them for appropriate relationship counseling, parent training, or other relevant services.
- Provide transitional housing or other support for a young adult who is seeking to "launch" himself away from his family home and forward into a life of his own.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Contribute to a scholarship fund that helps young adults receive training or certification to qualify for suitable careers in life.

- Help create a mentoring program for young adults at your place of work, house of worship, community center, or other organization (and if one already exists, serve as a volunteer).
- Support organizations that offer meaningful job experiences for young adults during their moratorium years, including the Peace Corps, Job Corps, and AmeriCorps.

CHAPTER 9

Midlife

MOVING THROUGH MUDDY WATERS

Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself within a forest dark, For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

—DANTE ALIGHIERI[1]

During the time of Confucius (500 BCE), when the parent of a member of the Chinese ruling elite died, the son was obliged to suspend his everyday activities, abandon his normal residence, and build a hut next to his parent's grave where he would live for the next three years in quiet mourning. This custom had the effect of freeing up members of the scholarly class from their busy governmental and political duties in midcareer. It allowed them time to engage in philosophical, artistic, literary, and spiritual pursuits, a practice that continued throughout the history of the imperial court and served ultimately to enrich the cultural life of China.[2]

In contemporary Japan, when women reach the age of thirty-three and men celebrate their forty-second birthdays, they are said to have entered their *yakudoshi* or "calamity year" when they are advised to take special precautions to avoid accidents, illnesses, or other misfortunes believed to be caused by evil spirits. During this year (and the year before and after it as well), a person is encouraged to visit Shinto shrines, acquire amulets for spiritual protection, engage in special rituals to ward off evil, and avoid starting new business ventures.[3]

Each of these Asian traditions requires its members to take a break from the hustle and bustle that had characterized early adulthood up to that point, and encourages them to create a quiet space in their lives for a few years

within which to reflect upon the deeper meaning of their place in the cosmos. As such, these two cultural traditions were among the first to recognize the developmental significance of midlife as a time for temporarily getting off the treadmill of daily routine in order to assess the big picture of one's life.

The need for such a midlife break, however, has a far longer and more ominous history behind it. For most of humanity's existence, this "break," occurring in what we now call the *middle* of our human life span, was known as *death.* Few people in prehistoric times even made it into their thirties or forties.[4] Once human beings had discharged their evolutionary responsibilities for reproducing children and raising them to the point where the children could take care of themselves, they were no longer biologically necessary, and so evolution made few genetic provisions for extending life beyond that point.[5] Thus, for more than a hundred thousand years of human development, what we consider *midlife* was in fact *end of life* for most people. Although history and culture have intervened very recently to change that formula and add extra decades to our lives (as recently as 1900 in the United States the life span of the average adult was only forty-seven), there is still something inside of us that remembers our original ancestral date with destiny when we reach our thirties or forties. This recollection reverberates as a kind of atavistic death knell, demanding some new type of creative adaptation from those of us who are graced by modern sanitation methods and antibiotics to live into our fifties, sixties, seventies, and beyond.

ALONE IN A DARK WOOD

The experience of going through midlife varies widely, extending from being totally bowled over by its repercussions—the so-called "midlife crisis"—to remaining relatively untouched by its impact. Among the *rememberers* in society, including artists, poets, and others who are most likely to tremble when the tympanum of humanity is struck at its deepest levels, the results are apt to be quite dramatic. Psychoanalyst Eliot Jacques, the man credited with "inventing" the concept of midlife crisis in a paper written in 1965, originally conceived of this developmental event when he noticed a tendency toward crisis in the lives of creative men during their middle and late thirties.[6] He discovered that many of them either died at

midlife (including Mozart, Frédéric Chopin, Arthur Rimbaud, Henry Purcell, Charles Baudelaire, and van Gogh) or went through powerful transformations in their work during their mid- to late thirties when they embraced a more serious and hard-won creativity. Dante was thirty-seven when he began *The Divine Comedy.* Michelangelo was thirty-seven when he started to paint the Sistine Chapel. Shakespeare was in his late thirties when he wrote his great tragedies *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear.* Jacques suggested that midlife is a signal that youth and childhood are gone, that maturity is now the chief developmental task in life, and that death is something that looms up ahead as an inevitable prospect.

For many creative individuals, midlife actually *feels* like death. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote to a friend, "I am at the end of the 35th year of my life . . . for 1,500 years they called this period the 'midpoint of life' . . . But I, at the mid-point of life, am so 'in the midst of death' that it may take me hourly . . ."[7] The main character in Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* declares, "I am forty years old now, and you know forty years is a whole lifetime; you know it is extreme old age. To live longer than forty years is bad manners, is vulgar, immoral."[8] Jungian psychologist Maria von Franz suggested that the *puer aeternus* (eternal youth) who has refused to grow up as an adult, may be at risk for an early death at this time if he has not made a firm commitment to adult responsibilities.[9] I remember being terrified by this pronouncement when I read von Franz's book in my early thirties. Somewhat of a man-child myself, unmarried, and conflicted about whether I wanted to continue to work with children or not, I did, in fact, go through a depression at the age of thirty-seven when I had trouble eating, sleeping, and functioning at work due to an obsession with the fear of death.

While man's prehistory may tell him at midlife that his time is just about up, his history and culture whisper something else: that new and vastly different things are on the horizon and about to be born within him. As it turns out, my own midlife crisis at thirty-seven presaged my marriage at thirty-nine, my first-time status as a homeowner at forty, and the beginning of a successful writing and speaking career in my early forties. While struggling with my own midlife demons, I found the example of psychoanalyst Carl Jung inspirational in helping me to see that there was light at the end of the midlife tunnel. When Jung was in his late thirties, he

went through a depression after he had made a decisive split with his mentor, Sigmund Freud, because of a number of personal and professional conflicts.[10] One night Jung had a dream that recalled to him the days that he had spent as a child playing on the shores of Lake Zurich where he had spent his childhood. He remembered that as a youngster he had created little towns from the sticks and stones that littered the beach (this childhood preoccupation was similar in some ways to the miniature worlds of the Brontë children). Always one to take the cue from his dream life, Jung began to play once again at the age of thirty-seven like the child he had been. After a morning of sessions with his psychiatric patients, Jung would go off on his lunch break to the beach—he still lived on the lake—and play with the sand, stones, and water to recreate his make-believe worlds of childhood.

The process of playing like a child at midlife initiated a period for Jung of vivid dreams, fantasies, and visions. Between the ages of thirty-seven and forty-two Jung went through an intense psychological—some would even say partially psychotic—process that almost destroyed him, but from which he eventually emerged as a stronger and more creative person. He wrote in *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, "The years when I was pursuing my inner images were the most important in my life—in them everything essential was decided. It all began then; the later details are only supplements and clarifications of the material that burst forth from the unconscious, and at first swamped me. It was the *prima materia* for a lifetime's work."[11] Jung visually documented this process in his famous "Red Book," a folio volume bound in red leather vividly illustrated with mythic images that emerged during his dreams and his waking meditations at that time.[12] In his dreams and visions, Jung encountered biblical figures, Germanic heroes, Hindu deities, and images of fire, darkness, and blood among many other phenomena. Of particular importance was the discovery in his unconscious of a wise old man, Philomel, a gurulike figure that spoke to him and helped orient him to his new life. "It was he who taught me psychic objectivity, the reality of the psyche,"[13] wrote Jung.

Here at midlife, Jung seemed to be going through a transformative event that mirrored in many ways the journey of Odysseus into Hades. In Chapter II of the *Odyssey* (called the *Nekyia*, which is Greek for "journey into the night"), Odysseus descended into the world of the dead to consult with the soul of the old wise man Tereseias about how to get home to Ithaca. He had

to confront his dead mother, his fellow Greek warriors who had fallen in the Trojan War, and a host of other figures, and had to give them blood to drink so that they could communicate with him from the other world. Similarly, Jung had to dive into his own psychic underworld, confront archetypal figures, and consult with his own wise old man, Philomel, in order to find his way home, that is, achieve greater psychological integration. Jung's journey mirrored in many ways the adolescent's rite of passage to maturity. Like the adolescent, Jung descended into the subconscious world to encounter once again the archetypes of early childhood and to retrieve his deeper self, the better to advance into the next stage of life. The profound difference between these two transitions, however, is that the adolescent needs to be assisted through the passage by a mature adult, while Jung as a fully mature adult himself, found his mentor from within. Also, and more importantly, the adolescent's rite of passage was a movement *outward* into active involvement with the world, while Jung's journey was directed *inward* toward the source of his own creative becoming.

APPROACHING THE NOON OF LIFE

Jung's personal experience of midlife tumult was instrumental in advancing his revolutionary proposal that adulthood, and in particular life after the age of thirty-five, was a valuable area of study for psychologists. Up until that point, virtually all attention in developmental psychology had been focused on childhood and adolescence. Frequently in his writings Jung used the metaphor of the sun sweeping through the sky to describe midlife (noon) as a significant marker between the first and the second halves of life: "In the morning [the sun] rises from the nocturnal sea of unconsciousness and looks upon the wide, bright world which lies before it in an expanse that steadily widens the higher it climbs in the firmament . . . At the stroke of noon the descent begins. And the descent means the reversal of all the ideals and values that were cherished in the morning."[14]

Jung suggested that midlife marks the time to begin cultivating whatever was neglected during the first half of life. This means that if you spent the first half of your life seeking social prestige, material wealth, or other external trappings of a successful life, then during the second half of life you need to balance these outer achievements with a move toward the cultivation of less material pursuits, such as family and spirituality. The

Nobel Prize-winning author Octavio Paz also regarded high noon as a critical stage in human development. He writes: “Noon and midnight are the hours of ritual suicide. At noonday everything stops for a moment, vacillating; life, like the sun, asks itself whether it is worth the effort to go on.”[15] Perhaps, then, what is required turns out to be not physical death for most, but a death in outlook; the death of what is most valued during youth, and the subsequent birth of new possibilities for living in the years ahead.

Admittedly, few people go through the kind of massive psychological transformation that Jung went through in his thirties and forties. These existential midlife upheavals may happen mainly to the *rememberers* of society, or to emotionally disturbed individuals who failed to master the tasks of earlier stages, or to individuals possessing some combination of these two elements. In fact, many current studies of midlife development suggest that for most people midlife may not be a crisis at all but rather a series of more gentle incremental changes that occur physiologically, emotionally, and socially over the course of several years. “Almost everyone over 40 claims to have it, or knows someone who surely has it, but I do not think more than one person in ten is experiencing a genuine midlife crisis,” says Orville Gilbert Brim, director of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Midlife Development (also known as MIDMAC), a multiyear interdisciplinary research effort that carried out the most comprehensive scientific study of middle adulthood ever attempted.[16] While nearly one quarter of respondents indicated they had experienced a crisis during midlife, only 10 percent, according to Brim, seemed to fit the image of a person undergoing an existential upheaval or a crisis in meaning. For many others, midlife actually represented an improvement of their sense of well-being. We will look at these developments in the next chapter on mature adulthood. However, the basic issues that Jung and others like him have articulated concerning midlife crisis still seem highly germane to the lives of anyone who is traveling through their thirties and forties.

NOTICING THE CREASES

Of particular importance to many people at midlife are the physical changes of aging that begin to occur around this time. A Shakespeare sonnet warns: “When forty winters shall besiege thy brow / And dig deep trenches in thy

beauty's field, / Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now, / Will be a tottered weed of small worth held . . ."[17] As noted earlier, Nature seems to lose interest in us when we move out of the main childbearing and child-rearing years, and the body, no longer so necessary for that strenuous work of creating and raising children, begins to break down. As one man taking part in a research study on aging described it, "It was the sudden heart attack in a friend that made the difference. I realized that I could no longer count on my body as I used to do."[18] For many others, the changes are more subtle. You may notice that your eyes no longer focus like they used to and that you need to start using reading glasses. The name for this condition is *presbyopia,* meaning "old eyes," and is due to the loss of elasticity in the eye lens. Your joints may start to creak and hurt because of degeneration in the cartilage protecting the bone, a process that begins in the twenties and thirties. Men may notice changes in their hair. It's gone gray, or thinned out, or disappeared completely in some areas, while sprouting anew in ears, noses, and eyebrows. For women, eyebrows may thin, and hair may disappear on the arms and legs but reappear with a vengeance on the upper lip or chin. For both sexes, skin starts to wrinkle, the chin doubles, varicose veins pop out on legs, bags and crow's-feet surround eyes, and gigantic freckles appear on hands and the rest of the body that aren't freckles at all but rather *lentigo sinilis* (age spots).

Starting at about age forty, you get more easily winded due to reductions in the ability of your heart and lungs to keep up with the anaerobic load placed on them, and as a result you're not as able to keep up with your kids or young adults at strenuous sports. You may even start coming down with a plethora of sports-related injuries or develop back problems at work. Your height starts to go down due to the loss of thickness in the inter-vertebral discs, which decreases the space between the vertebrae and shortens the overall length of the spine. Your weight starts to go up, particularly in the nether regions. There seems to be a general loss of vitality compared to those early adult years, although exercise and a good diet can keep you from noticing this for many more years. Eventually, the time comes when you take a look in the mirror and startle for a moment when you see yourself. One female participant in a midlife study registered her own alarm: "The first time I saw myself as getting older . . . I picked up

a mirror and . . . I went ‘Oh, that’s me!’ It was really weird; it was funny because I saw my mother.”[19]

Although your brain continues to grow new synapses, and even new neurons throughout mature and late adulthood, beginning in your mid-forties to early fifties there are gradual losses in neuron growth in certain areas of the brain that can contribute to age-associated memory loss, or the infamous “senior moments” of life. These losses also tend to slow down the quick mental reflexes that you had in early adulthood. You may find that you’re not quite as “sharp” or quick-witted as you used to be, although you may make up for this by being more worldlywise and cagey in your judgments. You may take longer to think something through, but when you do, it is often more insightful than a younger person’s thinking capacity. As an illustration, the mean age for world chess champions—who have three minutes to make a move—is thirty, while the mean age for “chess by mail” world champions—who have three days to deliberate—is forty-six.[20] Some research suggests that after leveling off in the twenties, brain myelination (the insulation of brain cells allowing for more efficient transmission of neural messages) takes off again in the forties and continues into the mid-fifties, accumulating on average a 50 percent increase before leveling off.[21] I’ll have more to say about this brain growth in the next chapter.

NAVIGATING “THE PAUSE”

For women in midlife, a key biological change is the waning of reproductive capacity. You may start to notice fluctuations in your menstrual cycle as early as your thirties, but more often in the forties when the number of active follicles containing eggs in your ovaries begins to decline. Sometimes it may feel like menarche all over again but in reverse, as one woman noted: “All these physical changes are happening. At first, you’re unsure of your body and what it’s going to do each month. Your body is unfamiliar again, like when you were 14 and just starting your period.”[22] This decline in the number of active follicles during the thirties and forties triggers hormones in the pituitary gland to start “screaming” at the ovaries to resume their early adulthood levels, which they’re unable to do, causing wide fluctuations in the levels of estrogen and FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone). These hormonal ups and downs can result in mood swings, vasomotor or “hot” flashes, insomnia, and headaches that can be

frequent and severe in ten to twenty percent of American women. Sometimes these symptoms produce anxiety, nausea, weakness, or feelings of claustrophobia or suffocation, but more often they are a minor nuisance, as indicated in this woman's account: "At times you do feel terribly warm. I would sit and feel the water on my head, and wonder how red I looked. But I wouldn't worry about it, because it is a natural thing, and why get worried about it? I remember one time, in the kitchen, I had a terrific hot flash . . . I went to look at myself in the mirror. I didn't even look red, so I thought, 'All right . . . the next time I'll just sit there, and who will notice? And if someone notices, I won't even care.'"[23]

It appears that at least some of the symptoms of menopause may be culturally conditioned. Japanese women, for example, are far less likely to report hot flashes than American women.[24] The Western medical tradition has probably fueled a negative image of menopausal women as a result of its male-biased disease-based view of this transition. As recently as 1963, physician Robert A. Wilson wrote about the psychological condition of women going through menopause in the following way: ". . . a large percentage of women . . . acquire a vapid cow-like feeling called a 'negative state' . . . it is a strange endogenous misery . . . the world appears as though through a gray veil and they live as docile, harmless creatures, missing most of life's values."[25] In actuality, depression is rare during *perimenopause* (the multiyear transition leading up to true menopause that occurs on the day when there is the actual cessation of a woman's menstrual cycle). It is mostly a problem in women who have already experienced depression earlier in their lives.[26]

Far more important than the physiological changes that accompany approaching menopause are the actual role transitions that women go through during this "change of life"; a euphemism that turns out to be far more accurate in many ways than the medical terminology used to describe it. Children may be starting to leave home to lead independent lives. Aging parents may require closer attention as their health begins to decline. Many women may be reassessing the roles they played during early adulthood, and possibly experience regrets over some of the choices they made ten or twenty years earlier. A study of women reviewing their lives in their thirties and forties indicated that most of their regrets were about having chosen a traditionally feminine role with a focus on marriage, mothering, and the

home. The majority of those feeling these kinds of regrets desired to make changes in the future involving developing career goals or pursuing educational opportunities. Those who made changes in subsequent years experienced far more well-being than those who failed to take positive action.[27]

The life of author and Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison provides a good example of a woman's midlife individuation. In her twenties, Morrison had earned a master's degree in English and began teaching at the university level. Married at twenty-six, she continued teaching after having two sons. Unhappy in her marriage, she attended a small writers' group at age thirty. One day, having forgotten to bring something to read to the group, she sat down and wrote a short story loosely based on a girl she had known in childhood who had prayed to God to be given blue eyes like the white girls she envied. The writers' group loved the story, but Morrison put it away for several years. After her divorce at age thirty-three, she obtained a job as an associate editor with a textbook subsidiary at Random House. In the next couple of years, Morrison began turning the short story into a novel, drawing on her memories of childhood to create characters that began to have lives of their own. While working all day as a textbook editor, a housekeeper took care of her sons. In the evening, Morrison cooked dinner, played with the boys until bedtime, and then worked on her novel into the late hours. At thirty-six, she began working as a senior editor at Random House and started sending her novel out to various publishers. Finally, at age thirty-nine, her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published to critical acclaim, beginning a literary career that would culminate in her winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 at the age of sixty-two. Like Jung, Morrison turned to her childhood at midlife to retrieve a storehouse of images that she then used as a foundation for her creative work in the second half of life. But as an African-American woman, Morrison had accomplished something even more remarkable: forging an identity as a novelist (a difficult proposition for anybody) in the shadow of centuries of racism, and in the midst of her heavy responsibilities as a single working mom.[28]

BEYOND MALE MIDLIFE MYTHS

The real story of *men* at midlife has been in many ways obscured by the onslaught of media stereotypes concerning men who reach thirty-five or forty. These so-called *middlescents* (the midlife version of an adolescent) are said to crave sports cars, women half their age, and life on exotic tropical islands. Or, alternatively, these "sad victims" of *andropause* (male menopause) are depicted as unable to maintain the frantic lovemaking of their early adult years without the benefit of Viagra, Cialis, or some other drug designed to treat male erectile dysfunction. However, there appears to be little empirical support for the view that men go through an actual physiological "climacteric" that parallels in any significant way what women experience in menopause.[29] Levels of the male hormone testosterone *do* decline in men as they age, but the decrease is so gradual (about 1 percent per year after age forty) that it is unlikely to account for the dramatic decrease in libido or loss of erectile function that some men may experience during midlife. These events may be due instead to other causes, including the stress of having greater responsibilities in middle adulthood and changes in adrenal androgenic steroids, which decline by 50 percent from age twenty to age fifty.

On the other hand, like women, men may be going through significant personal and professional changes in their lives that give some credence to the idea that the male midlife crisis may have some basis in fact. In particular, many men go through a process of reassessment when it comes to their *work* life, where much of their identity has been invested during the previous twenty years. Actually it is here, rather than in a man's physiology, where the concept of a male climacteric (from the Greek word *klimacter* meaning "rung of a ladder") may have most relevance. The metaphor of a ladder is an apt image to use in describing a man's ascent toward higher levels of achievement in the workplace. Some men find their climb up the ladder of success in midlife suddenly stopped by the logic of the business they are in, as they get shunted aside into middle manager positions or other "dead-end" jobs. After all, only a few men are allowed to occupy the top regions of the corporate pyramid. One midlife businessman expressed his personal feelings of dread by saying, "Every once in a while, I just think, my God, the whole goddamn roof is going to fall in. This is sort of what scares me at 45. I'm about halfway through and what is the second half going to be like because the first half has been pretty good, business-wise. I sometimes think about what will the long downhill slope be like. Will I end

up at 65 making $15,000 or $10,000 a year? I think one of these days the whole goddamn roof is going to fall in. I just can't keep going like this."[30]

Other men find to their horror that they have been climbing up the *wrong* ladder. They long to reconnect with the Dream they may have formulated in their early twenties, yet worry that it might be too late to do so. The Germans have a word for this fear: *Torschlusspanik*, meaning literally, "the panic of closing doors." This sort of tragic awakening is well dramatized in Henrik Ibsen's play *Rosmersholm* by the figure of Ulrik Brendel, a middle-aged tutor who had been bragging to acquaintances about all the creative literary works that he had inside of him just waiting to get out. One day, however, he came to a disturbing conclusion: "For five and twenty years I have been like a miser sitting on his locked money-chest. And then today, when I opened it to take out my treasure—there was nothing there! The mills of time had ground it into dust."[31]

In a similar way, some men at midlife look back wistfully to the novel they wanted to write, the business they wished they had started, or the travels they desired to take, and they feel the pain and the distance of the lost years of their youth, wondering if there is any time left for them to redeem themselves.

Still other men reach the top of the ladder and may briefly exult at their accomplishments. But after that, they wonder, "What now?" And their very successes may precipitate a crisis in meaning. Such was the case with nineteenth-century Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. At midlife, Tolstoy was a success by any outward measure. He was married with a large family, was financially secure as a landowner, and had penned two of the greatest novels ever written, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. But in his mid-forties, Tolstoy began to be plagued with misgivings about the meaning of all these achievements. These doubts were at first transient, but they began to recur more and more often, always with the same theme. Tolstoy writes: "Amid the thoughts of estate management which greatly occupied me at that time, the question would suddenly occur: Well, you will have 6,000 desyatinas [approx. 2.75 acres) of land in Samara Government and 300 horses, and what then? . . . And I was quite disconcerted and did not know what to think. Or when considering plans for the education of my children, I would say to myself: What for? Or when considering how the peasants might become prosperous, I would suddenly say to myself: But what does it matter to me? Or when thinking of the fame my works would bring me, I

would say to myself, Very well; you will be more famous than Gogol or Pushkin or Shakespeare or Molière, or than all the writers in the world—and what of it? And I could find no reply at all."[32] Tolstoy was plunged into a crisis that led to a religious conversion experience at age fifty and a life of piety until his death at the age of eighty-two. His developmental history serves as an excellent example of Jung's idea about how the second half of life should seek to develop qualities neglected in the first half of life. His youth was dedicated to hedonism, military exploits, carving out a literary career, and raising a family. His later years were devoted to pacifism, asceticism, philanthropy, and spiritual growth.

Interestingly, research has indicated that when men are asked to draw a picture of themselves, they draw bigger and bigger images throughout early adulthood, mirroring their burgeoning self-confidence, but then in midlife these images start to become smaller, as if revealing a greater sense of vulnerability or humility in the face of life's mysteries.[33] One can see a similar process going on in the self-portraits of Rembrandt van Rijn, who in his twenties showed himself as a dashing young blade with gold armor and a fashionable beret, but by his forties and beyond portrayed himself in simple peasant's clothing with a somber expression on his face.[34]

In midlife, whether he has reached his goals or not, a man often finds himself required to modify those goals that he set for himself in early adulthood by drawing back from the traditional "slash and burn" masculine attitude of youth, and adopting a softer, even feminine, outlook on life. Psychiatrist Allan B. Chinen observes that many myths and legends of midlife involve a man being rescued by a woman. In Homer's *The Odyssey,* the Greek goddess Athena comes down from Mount Olympus and helps Odysseus through many difficulties in his quest to return to Ithaca and resume his rightful place at the helm of his household. In *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice leads Dante out of the uncertainty of Purgatory and into the bliss of Paradise. In Egyptian mythology, Osiris is taken down from the tree of crucifixion and made whole again by his wife, Isis.[35] In a similar fashion, modern man may find himself incorporating more feminine qualities to balance the masculinity of his early adulthood by turning to the arts or by spending more time as a caregiver to his family or community.

The word *care* becomes particularly important as a watchword in midlife for both men and women as they begin to reach maturity and assume responsibility for the society that once took care of them. Now it is

their turn to be the nurturers. Erik Erikson said that middle adulthood (from ages thirty-four to sixty) is a time when *generativity* becomes the chief developmental task, and *stagnation*, or failure to generate, is the main obstacle to further psychological growth. In early adulthood this meant literally giving birth to and raising children as well as contributing to society through one's productivity at work. In middle adulthood this broadens out to include other forms of generativity, including teaching, doing scientific research, or enriching the culture in other ways. In the next chapter, we will see how this concept of generativity ultimately flowers in the lives of the fully mature adult.

THE GIFT OF MIDLIFE: CONTEMPLATION

Most people are familiar with Auguste Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker*, which shows a middle-aged man deep in thought. Few individuals, however, know that Rodin originally modeled this image on that of Dante Alighieri, the Italian poet who began his monumental work *The Divine Comedy* with the sober evaluation of his midlife crisis that began this chapter. If there is anything unique to midlife as a stage of human development, it seems to be *contemplation.* By the time a person reaches thirty-five or forty, she has accumulated enough adult life experience to deserve a good mulling over. She also has achieved enough brain maturity to be able to engage in a process of deeper reflection and evaluation. Many things happen in midlife that merit contemplation: the body is getting older, children are growing up, work roles may be changing, relationships may be going through a transition. We've already seen in this chapter how some societies have traditionally set aside time for people in midlife to engage in a period of reflection, during which they can probe into their psyches to find potentials that will help them move successfully into subsequent stages of life and enrich the quality of their culture.

This gift of contemplation in midlife is valuable at any time during adulthood. Even in early adulthood, when the focus tends to be on *adapting* to society, there is still a need for taking time out to reflect on where one is going in life, and on what the ultimate meaning of life may be. But especially as we age in midlife and beyond, we often find ourselves

becoming increasingly inner-directed and need time to contemplate life's mysteries and our place in the universe. We may discover that we're paying more attention to nighttime dreams and daytime intuitions. We may find that deep reflection turns into prayer or meditation, and opens up new philosophical, religious, or spiritual horizons (traditionally, mystics such as Saint Teresa of Avila, Jakob Böhme, Jalalu'l-Din Rumi, and Isaac Luria were often referred to as "contemplatives"). We may decide to turn our contemplations into an integral part of our lifestyle through meditation, periodic retreats, or by staying mindful in the midst of everyday life. However we choose to gaze inwardly, we can be sure that our contemplations will enrich us by bringing insight, tranquility, or even a new sense of identity into our lives.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT MIDLIFE

FOR YOURSELF

- Keep a journal of your dreams, visions, reflections, and feelings as you begin to experience the sense of becoming an older person.
- Make a list of all the things you want to do in your life before you die. Then start doing them.
- Go over the goals you've had for your life as an adult, and see if they are still relevant to your current life. If not, then modify them accordingly.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Gather friends into a "midlife" support group that meets regularly to discuss social, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual changes going on in your lives.
- Support a friend or family member who may be going through a "midlife crisis" by offering counsel, friendship, and/or referral to an appropriate mental health professional or program.
- Help a midlife friend or family member who has been "downsized" find another job or career.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Start a women's or men's group for middle-aged adults in your community to help them cope with major life transitions in

relationships, jobs, and/or illness.

- Contribute financially to a woman’s midlife health center that serves the poor and indigent.
- Volunteer at an organization that provides midlife career advice or job placement services.

CHAPTER 10

Mature Adulthood

SCALING THE PEAKS

Youth is a silly, vapid state
Old age with fears and ills is rife
This simple boon I beg of Fate
A thousand years of Middle Life!

—CAROLYN WELLS[1]

In medieval times the Catholic worldview of the human life span was often depicted as a circle. In the center was the image of Christ. Around this divine hub, like a Wheel of Fortune, were illustrations of the different ages of life from infancy to the grave. Each age, like a spoke, was equidistant from the hub. This suggested that every point in human life existed in the same sacred relationship to the divine. During the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, however, this symbolism underwent a profound and lasting change. Instead of a circle, the image of an ascending and descending staircase became prevalent. This image seemed better suited to the new importance of work, ambition, and changing social roles in the emerging market economy of Protestant Europe. Theater productions would be put on showing a tableau of five ascending and five descending steps. On each step was an actor representing that particular stage of life. This is where we may have originally developed our notion of the "stages of life." Each stage or step usually represented one decade.

At the top of the tableau, on the highest step, stood a man or woman (or sometimes both) representing the age of fifty. To be fifty meant to be at the peak of life.[2]

In many ways, this valuation of middle age still holds true. While it may be granted that we live in a youth-oriented society, it is still the oldsters—especially those in their fifties through seventies—who control the financial and leadership positions that underwrite it. Behind every twenty-year-old singing star is a sixty-year-old stockholder who capitalizes on her fame. Shakespeare's image of this time of life was of the prosperous and portly judge in *As You Like It* : ". . . in fair round belly with good capon lined / With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut / Full of wise saws and modern instances . . ."[3] Late middle age, or mature adulthood as we're calling it here, is a time of culmination for many significant social roles. This is the time of life when Odysseus returned home after twenty years of fighting, scheming, and journeying, to assume his rightful place as the king of Ithaca. The pillars of the community come from this stage of life: justices, presidents, eminent professors, ambassadors, senators, CEOs, religious figures, philanthropists, Nobel Prize winners, and others who have capped a lifetime of achievement with positions of authority. As for the rest of us, mature adulthood is a time when, after years of everybody picking on us, telling us what to do, bossing us around, instructing us, and in other ways ruling over our lives, we're finally free of all that: We're on top! And yet, at the same time, the top step of life's staircase has a precarious quality to it because the next step, and all subsequent steps, at least in terms of *body up* development, head in one direction and one direction only: down toward the grave.

A WHOLE NEW STAGE OF LIFE

This staircase model of human development, which views the fifties as the beginning of decline, seems to be undergoing a major transformation. Nowadays experts are more likely to conceptualize the life span tableau as five ascending stairs, with a wide platform at the top for those in their fifties and sixties (and even for many in their seventies and eighties), before a rather precipitous drop into illness and death. At age fifty, Americans can look forward to another thirty years of life.[4] Advances in medicine and education mean that people in their fifties, sixties, and seventies are healthier, better educated, and have the prospect of far more *able* years ahead of them than was the case for their parents or grandparents.

Just to show how far this can go, journalist and author Dudley Clendinen related an incident that happened on a plane ride to Florida: ". . . I sat with a woman of 60, on her way to her winter home. Her latest boyfriend, a businessman of almost 70, had acquired a certain cachet in his peer group when sued by a young woman for sexual harassment. That did not bother my planemate so much because she believed him when he said the woman came after him, and so did the jury at the trial. But it troubled her mother, who is 85, and who found out about it when her fifth husband, who is 91, saw notice of it in a business journal he gets at his office."[5] This scenario makes us wonder when middle age actually ends. It recalls baseball great Satchel Paige's words when a reporter asked him how old he was. Paige reputedly replied: "How old would you be if you didn't know how old you was?"

The truth is that for many people, mature adulthood represents the time of greatest life satisfaction. You've passed beyond the insecurities of early adulthood ("Will anyone love me?" "Will I find a place for myself in the world of work?"). You've reconciled with many of the anxieties of midlife ("Oh my God! I'm growing older!" "Will I achieve my ambitions?"). But you haven't yet reached old age when chronic illness and concerns about approaching death can take center stage. You've raised a family perhaps, and seen your young ones leave the nest and live independent lives, freeing you up to enjoy your own life more fully. After years of work, you've hopefully accumulated at least some degree of financial security. You've perhaps begun to take on satisfying new roles as a grandparent, a mentor, and/or a community leader. You're possibly engaged in nurturing activities that involve less struggle and angst than earlier adult roles, where you might have had to discipline a cranky two-year-old or compete with a coworker for a better paying job.

Contrary to popular opinion and all those humorous "over-the-hill" greeting cards—which seem to take their cue from the sixteenth-century staircase motif noted earlier—life in the fifties, sixties, and beyond is in many cases *better* than what went before. Research from the MacArthur Foundation Study of Successful Midlife Development (MIDMAC) seems to bear this out. It suggests that as adults move into their fifties and beyond, negative emotions decrease and positive emotions increase steadily until very late in the life span when the physical decline associated with a final illness and death occurs.[6] The sense of control over work, finances, and

marriage increases with age beginning in the late forties to the early fifties. Women in particular report higher levels of positive relations with others as they age.[7] Dancer and teacher Ruth Zaporah expresses this sentiment in her own reflections on life in mature adulthood: “In my fifties I feel ripely quiet. Life seems much simpler; I am more appreciative. More of life seems funny to me, humorous and light. I consistently have a good time. It hasn’t always been like that. I’m worming my way out of the darkness. I can say that now I feel pretty comfortable in just about every situation, whereas I used to be nonverbal, never able to express myself. I could never go to parties. I haven’t done much therapy; I think it’s been my work that’s done the healing.”[8]

A Time to Be Generative

A vital key to successful aging appears to involve the capacity to give back to the community in some meaningful way. As Harvard psychiatrist and human development researcher George Vaillant has said, “Biology flows downhill.” This means that the older generation is put on earth to take care of the younger generation, and not vice versa. Erik Erikson used the word *generativity* to describe this impulse and indicated that the term could be applied to roles as disparate as the birthing and parenting of a child, the creation of an artistic work, the teaching of students in a classroom, or the development of a community service project to feed the hungry. Being generative in one’s fifties and beyond has less to do with giving birth to, raising, or educating individual children and more to do with nurturing and caring for future generations on a more collective basis. A person can do this through teaching, refereeing, coaching, mentoring, or engaging in other service-oriented pursuits. Generativity expert John Kotre explains, “Japanese colleagues have translated ‘generativity’ as ‘sedai-keisho-sei.’ ‘Sedai’ means ‘the generations,’ ‘keisho’ means something like ‘receiving and putting your stamp on,’ and ‘sei’ means ‘the sense of.’ Generativity, from this point of view, is the sense of receiving something from the past, putting your unique contribution into it, and passing it on to the future. It’s what you do when you stand ‘between the generations.’”[9]

MIDMAC research suggests that meaningful engagement in generative activities with schools, communities, the extended family, and other groups and organizations is linked to psychological well-being in middle age.[10]

Drew Leder, an expert on the aging process, agrees: “Maybe we feel moved to cuddle abandoned crack babies warehoused in a local hospital. This gift of love is a simple kind of mentoring. Perhaps we might teach a business class in a local penitentiary. The inmates may be desperate to acquire usable skills, not to mention some self-esteem. Or maybe we will decide to volunteer time assisting a young AIDS patient. In helping him work through his fear of death, we might begin to process our own.”[11] Such involvement with social institutions supplies an incredible human resource at little or no cost in dealing with the pressing needs of the world. As former counterculture expert and now generative senior Theodore Roszak writes: “. . . somebody who no longer has to worry about raising a family, pleasing a boss or earning more money [has] the chance to join with others in building a compassionate society . . .”[12]

Mature adulthood is often the time of life when seeds planted at earlier stages of development come to fruition. Former vice president Al Gore, for example, traced his own deep concern for the issue of global warming back to an inspiring teacher he had as an undergraduate at Harvard in 1968. Oceanographer Roger Revelle was one of the first scientists to measure the growing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and warn of its potentially toxic “greenhouse effect” on the earth’s ecology. Gore writes in his book *An Inconvenient Truth*, “I will never forget the graph that he drew on the blackboard, nor the dramatic message it conveyed; that something profoundly new was happening to the atmosphere of the entire planet, and that this transformation was being caused by human beings.”[13] Now in his late fifties, Gore is reaching a peak in his dedication to environmental issues, starring in a documentary film with the same name as his book, and founding an investment firm—Generation Investment Management—that seeks out companies taking a responsible view on big global issues like climate change.[14]

When primatologist Jane Goodall was four years old, she spent four hours sitting quietly in a henhouse because she wanted to know how there could be an opening on a hen big enough for an egg to come out. Eventually her patience paid off and she saw a round object protruding beneath the feathers of a hen who clucked with pride and left the coop. Goodall writes: “Filled with excitement I squeezed out after her and ran home.”[15] In her mid-forties, after a renowned career studying the behavior of chimpanzees in Africa, Goodall founded the Jane Goodall Institute, and

has spent her fifties, sixties, and now seventies, traveling the world and teaching people about the need to preserve endangered wildlife and support healthy ecosystems for all living species.[16]

Another way to assist future generations is by working to preserve cultural traditions. George Vaillant refers to individuals who do this as "Keepers of the Meaning." According to Vaillant, a person who is a Keeper of the Meaning "speaks for past cultural achievements and guides groups, organizations, and bodies of people toward the preservation of past traditions . . . Matriarchs, genealogy mavens, and antiques refinishers are all exemplars of what is involved in becoming a keeper of the meaning."[17] Individuals who are generative in this way create bridges between the past, present, and future. One thinks of people like Gutzon Borglund, who sought to preserve our nation's heritage by creating Mount Rushmore, a project he didn't even start until age sixty, or Alex Haley, whose book on his African heritage, *Roots*, came out when he was fifty-five, or Maggie Kuhn, who founded the Gray Panthers at age sixty-five. One participant in Vaillant's study of Harvard men from the 1930s (a study that is still going on today), put it this way: "There is a certain peacefulness about becoming interested in genealogy, conservation, and history rather than meeting payrolls, running church rummage sales, and reining in teenagers."[18]

COPING WITH THE AGING BODY

As bright as the above picture seems to be, life in the fifty to seventy-five age bracket is not always a bed of roses. There is, for example, the matter of physical decline to consider. As we noted in the last chapter, major physical functions begin to deteriorate during midlife, and in mature adulthood things don't get any better. For many people this will be the time when they suffer their first major illness or chronic condition. Only 7 percent of those in their forties report having a disability. By the early fifties 16 percent do, and by the early sixties almost a third are disabled.[19] As we age into our fifties, the walls of the left ventricle of the heart become thicker and less compliant during each contraction while arteries are less able to accommodate the flow of blood. There is a progressive loss of muscle mass (referred to as *sarcopenia*) beginning in the forties and fifties that amounts to a 12 to 15 percent decline per decade. One study suggests, in fact, that muscular weakness measured by one's *handgrip* in midlife predicts

functional limitations and physical disability in old age.[20] In postmenopausal women (and in many men as well), bone density decreases, leading to microfractures in response to stress, as well as to the increased likelihood of developing osteoporosis. For some men, a decline in blood levels of testosterone after age sixty leads to erectile failures and loss of sexual appetite, while for others the prostate grows in size, squeezing the urethra and causing numerous visits to the bathroom at night. As one fifty-two-year-old Pennsylvania male observed, "At 40, you know you're not as young as you used to be. At 50, you realize it almost every day."[21]

Fortunately, there is a great deal we can do to ward off, delay, or minimize the impact of such physiological assaults. Research points strongly to a number of practical measures that promote physical health in mature adulthood, including not smoking, not drinking more than one glass of wine (for women) or two glasses (for men) per day (and even that may be too much), exercising regularly, and eating a diet moderate in saturated fats. What many people bemoan as the effects of aging, including being overweight or chronically ill, is often due instead to the impact of an unhealthy lifestyle and years of hard living. That's why I like to call this stage of life "the chickens come to roost" stage. It represents a unique period in human development when genetic vulnerabilities are revealed for the first time in a big way while at the same time a person may receive a gigantic environmental wallop from years of overeating, poor nutrition, smoking, excessive use of alcohol, and/or lack of exercise. Studies suggest that these factors determine 70 percent of the physical attributes of people from sixty-five to seventy-five.[22] One startling finding from the MIDMAC study reveals that many middle-aged people at risk for major illness are remarkably naive about their personal contribution to their own destiny. For example, while 30 percent of forty-five to fifty-four-year-olds smoke regularly, 70 percent of them claim they have no higher risk of heart attack, and 60 percent say they have no higher risk of cancer, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary from decades of highly publicized scientific research.[23] As French moralist Jean de la Bruyere believed, "Most men spend the first half of their lives making the last half miserable."

Another danger of this time is more psychological in nature: the risk of becoming mentally and emotionally rigid with the years. This may cause a person to turn away from others while retreating into the glories of the past.

Such was the case with the mythical Greek scientist Daedelus, inventor of the labyrinth, the flying machine, and other ingenious devices, who became jealous of his talented inventor/nephew Perdix, and pushed him off a high tower.[24] Or, alternatively, an individual may become rigid with the years by falling into a pool of self-preoccupation and self-pity, like Oedipus the king of Thebes, who, after killing his father and marrying his mother as a young adult, curses his son in his old age, bewailing his fate, and denying any responsibility for his tragic life. Erik Erikson used the term *stagnation* to describe this potential peril during middle adulthood, saying that someone who becomes afflicted in this way is likely to retreat into invalidism or selfish obsessions. Shakespeare's portrayal of the hypocritical elder Polonius in *Hamlet* is a good example of this kind of "mature" stagnation. Polonius pretentiously offers his son "wise sayings" about life (including the famous line "To thine own self be true"), but then proceeds to violate them by spying on his son's youthful adventures. Carl Jung referred to middle-age stagnation when he wrote: "Anyone who fails to go along with life remains suspended, stiff and rigid in midair. That is why so many people get wooden in old age; they look back and cling to the past with a secret fear of death in their hearts. They withdraw from the life-process, at least psychologically, and consequently remain fixed like nostalgic pillars of salt, with vivid recollections of youth but no living relation to the present."[25] They are like Odysseus stranded in a becalmed Aegean Sea, without any wind to blow them home.

Instead of rolling with the years, stagnant middle-agers may seek to arrest the march of time by getting plastic surgery, taking "anti-aging" drugs, and retreating into "age ghettos" (retirement communities restricted to those over fifty or fifty-five), which shield them from contact with other stages of life. This static view of living one's "golden years" in a kind of sealed-off "haven of bliss," while golfing, shopping, and cruising the years away, has a hollow ring to it.[26] According to psychotherapist Irving Yalom, there is a danger that those who have lived through their productive years immersed in a materialistic culture will enter late middle age with a deep sense of existential emptiness. In the broader context of this book, these individuals have not used their time on earth to *remember* who they really are, nor to ponder life's deepest mysteries, but instead have squandered their years in a mindless *adaptation* to the superficial world around them. Yalom writes, "I see patients in their 60's coming in and looking at their

whole lives and feeling lots of sadness. They look back and say, 'I wasted my life. I filled it with worthless, trivial things, with rubbish.'"[27] One of the more dispiriting findings of the MIDMAC study is that for both men and women, there are steady declines in both personal growth and purpose in life as they move from midlife to old age.[28]

ENJOYING POSTMENOPAUSAL ZEST

The above findings suggest that there is an absence of significant social structures in our culture to help middle-aged adults make meaningful transitions into full maturity and later life. While other stages of life have rites of passage to mark the movement from one stage to another, such transition rituals, at least in modern societies, don't show up very often during mature adulthood. And yet, mature adults undergo a number of important changes as they move into their fifties and sixties. Perhaps the most important biological change for women is the cessation of their menstrual cycle. This occurs on average at around age fifty or fifty-one but can occur at any time from forty to fifty-eight. Despite the discomforts of peri-menopause that were cited in the previous chapter, there is a definite upside. At menopause women are liberated from the biological constraints that Nature (and often society as well) placed upon them during their childbearing years. This frees them to explore other aspects of their being, including cultural, creative, and spiritual potentials. Perhaps this is why anthropologist Margaret Mead is reputed to have said, "The most creative force in the world is the woman with postmenopausal zest."

In many cultures around the world, menopause signals an important and positive shift in the social status of women. Some traditional societies believe that menstrual blood is the creative force of life and that when it no longer flows out of a woman it remains inside of her as a source of great creative power and wisdom. Because of this belief, postmenopausal women in indigenous cultures are often honored as *rememberers* and allowed to perform socially significant activities that were denied to them during their years of menstruation. Postmenopausal Iroquois women can hold religious and political office. Yoruba women become ritual specialists. The oldest clan member of the St. Lawrence Island Eskimos, if she is a woman, leads the group and makes the most important decisions.[29] In many societies, postmenopausal women are believed to possess magical or curative powers,

which can lead to persecution as witches (as happened in Europe in the late middle ages), but may also lead to feelings of respect, admiration, and awe among members of the community. The image of the old women or *crone* is a powerful one in the mythologies and histories of indigenous cultures around the world, and includes the Slavic hag Baba Yaga, the Greek goddess Hecate, and the Nordic crone Urd.

Scientists now suspect that postmenopausal women may also have played a major adaptive role in the survival of our species. In one study of the Hadza people of northern Tanzania, the positive food-gathering behaviors of women in their fifties, sixties, and seventies were seen to be correlated with the nutritional welfare of the young children in the society. These Hadza "grandmothers" spent seven to eight hours a day foraging for food out in the woods, and gathered more food than any other segment of the population. Giving the mothers help in gathering food not only produced healthier babies, but also allowed mothers to have more children in a shorter space of time, thus increasing overall odds for survival.[30] This may help explain why women live for so many years beyond the cessation of their reproductive capacity, a feature that other primates do not have. In what has been called "the grandmother hypothesis," postmenopausal women are seen as critical supporters of our species' evolution, not only by foraging for food, but in assisting with prenatal care, helping with the birth event itself, and providing early childhood care and education. As anthropologist Dr. Kristen Hawkes of the University of Utah explains: "Only with the ascent of the grandmother . . . were human ancestors freed to exploit new habitats, to go where no other hominid or primate had gone before."[31]

In today's modern world, this deeper evaluation of the gifts of older women may have a broader meaning, encouraging them to break free from feminine roles that no longer serve them. At the same time, this realization spurs them on to create new cultural, creative, and spiritual roles that support a changing society. Margaret Mead based her notion of postmenopausal zest on her own life experiences in her late forties and early fifties. As midlife expert Gail Sheehy relates it in her book *The Silent Passage*, "Her adored husband had left the marriage, her closest colleague died, and she spent several years improvising a life as a divorced professional mother of a small child. But between the ages of forty-five and fifty-five, as [her daughter Mary Catherine] Bateson pieces together the

famous anthropologist's history, 'She seemed to become prettier, she bought a couple of designer dresses from Fabiani for the first time, and I think she started a new romantic relationship.' Boldly Dr. Mead returned to the field at the age of fifty-one: She boned up on languages and went back to New Guinea, forging a major intellectual new start with groundbreaking research on social change published in the book *New Lives for Old*."[32] Feminist Gloria Steinem suggests that this new burst of energy bears a resemblance to the life energy as it was originally expressed in a girl's childhood: "There is a great unexplored land after 60," she writes. "It may be best indicated by who you were when you were 9 or 10 and a little girl. Climbing trees and saying: 'I know who I am. I know what I want.' That's before the feminine role has come down upon you."[33]

Increasingly, women are beginning to celebrate their postmenopausal lives in contemporary culture with croning rituals that draw upon archetypal symbols from mythology and religion. Author and teacher Savina Teubal originally created a ritual she called Simchat Hochmah (Joy of Wisdom) to mark her sixtieth birthday. Drawing on many elements from her Jewish faith, she writes: ". . . the reason I was drawn to assume my new status with a ceremony was inspired by the Genesis narratives I have been so involved with for the past decade. I came to realize that the biblical stories that dealt with Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham were, in most cases, rituals. Each time a ritual was performed, the life of the protagonist changed radically . . ." In her own ritual, Teubal wore an ancient Macedonian robe which she discarded in the middle of the ceremony for a simple white linen garment, and at the end of the ritual she planted a tree.[34] Women from many faiths have been inspired by Teubal's example and have created their own unique rituals to celebrate their cronehood. These ceremonies have included elements such as chanting, singing, feasting, drumming, or being crowned by a wreath. They incorporate Jewish, Greek, Native American, Celtic, Egyptian, Indian, and/or Christian imagery. Author Edna Ward says, "Since the patriarchy isn't going to value old women, we celebrate ourselves."[35]

FROM THE ROCKING CHAIR TO REMBRANDT

Another important transition faced by most people as they move into the fifties, sixties, and beyond is retirement. This change, at least for men, has its own traditional ritual of sorts in American life: the awarding of a gold

watch in a ceremony witnessed by one's colleagues at work. At the beginning of the movie *About Schmidt* the aging Jack Nicholson character receives his watch at a hotel banquet, delivers a confused and meandering thank-you speech, and then abruptly walks out of the room and into an uncertain life in retirement. For many people, the prospect of retiring is a similarly daunting one. Typically in America, the time for retirement has been put at sixty-five, partly due to the customs of individual businesses, but also because Social Security benefits traditionally began at that age.[36] However, during the past two or three decades this pattern has become much fuzzier. Rather than living by labor leader Walter Reuther's dictum —"retire and then wait to die"—many people are deciding to retire early, or alternatively, to continue working full time or part time after official retirement age. At the same time, one study suggests that while 80 percent of people queried said they planned to keep on working at least part time past retirement age, fewer than 30 percent actually did so.[37]

A dramatic drop in employment occurs for the great majority of people during the sixties, according to midlife researcher Larry Bumpass.[38] Yet few people are prepared for it. Surveys show that most people welcome the idea of retirement if it's accompanied by adequate income. But studies show that more than 40 percent of households headed by someone aged forty-seven to sixty-four are not able to replace even *half* their preretirement income with savings and Social Security.[39] As television and movie personality Ben Stein observed, "I've seen so many friends whose lives were ruined by not planning for retirement. We have this obsession with spending and instant gratification and not saving or thrift."[40]

Graceful retirement is particularly problematic for cultures like the United States and Japan where the work ethic is so strong. In Japan, retired men are called *neureochiba* or "wet dead leaves" because of the way they seem to stick to their wives when they go out of the house. Still, retirement promises to bring years of satisfaction for those who plan adequate postretirement income, develop nurturing social networks, and cultivate their own personal development. Anthropologist Joel Savishinsky studied twenty-six people in upstate New York as they entered retirement. He followed his subjects for a number of years after retirement and discovered several amazing personal transformations during that time, including a banker who found Buddhism, a marine who became head of the school

board, a social worker who fell in love with Rembrandt, an engineer who learned to sculpt water, a doctor who turned into a moral historian, and a technician who became a teacher of tai chi. Savishinsky wrote, “There is no age limit to enthusiasm, and retirement is a period in which individuals can discover or rediscover their passionate interests. These can take many forms, including creative production, public service, travel, or spiritual and personal growth—the kinds of involvements that many people once consigned to weekends, but which can now become the focus for a new way of being and a reason for living.”[41]

THE SANDWICHED GENERATION

Another transition that affects most people in middle age is the final exit of children from the home. The average age of a parent when the last child leaves home for the last time ranges from fifty-five to fifty-nine.[42] The MIDMAC study suggests that the so-called “empty nest” is not really the crisis it has been portrayed to be by the media. Instead, most parents feel liberated from their roles as caregivers and free to explore their own personal goals, sometimes for the first time in their lives. In particular, those parents who maintain a positive relationship with their grown children often experience this time as a second honeymoon after the children leave.[43] Things can get a bit strained, however, when children who have left home return, and then return again, and yet again. As one mother explains, “I didn’t expect that I would have to provide room and board once my son was past 18–20 years old. My son’s multiple returning [three times] put a strain on my marriage. It is very expensive and we can’t alter the rooms in the house to create more privacy.”[44]

At the same time that parents are dealing with the problems of their still-maturing offspring, they may also be confronting the challenges of aging parents and feel squeezed between the two generations. “It is as if there are two mirrors before me, each held at a partial angle,” says one woman. “I see part of myself in my mother who is growing old, and part of her in me. In the other mirror, I see part of myself in my daughter. I have had some dramatic insights, just from looking into those mirrors . . . It is a set of revelations that I suppose can only come when you are in the middle of three generations.”[45] This can become a real problem for those parents who have postponed having children into the thirties and forties. One

midlife mother with a seven-year-old child explained, “My husband’s mother lives in Cape Town. He’s traveled to her deathbed three times. She’s had three heart operations—each time, she just sat up afterwards and carried on. People who don’t have small children can’t appreciate the split loyalties. But these days, if you’ve got younger children, [and] you’ve got an ailing parent—it goes with the territory.”[46]

Middle-aged daughters (and daughters-in-law), provide up to 90 percent of the medical and personal care for their functionally impaired parents in the United States.[47] Theodore Roszak reports: “Women have become the default caregivers of our society; they have been thrown into that role and forced to make the best of it. Theirs has been called the ‘sandwiched’ life. No sooner do they finish raising their children than their ailing parents move in for care.”[48] This phenomenon of role reversal, where the children become the parents and the parents become the children, can be draining for some. As one woman put it: “I was always around older people. I like helping them. I have a knack for it, dealing with older people, older *nice* people [unlike her own father] . . . But now I’ve learned my lesson: That you don’t mess with other people’s illnesses. They want you to do more and more and more.”[49] On the other hand, the process of caring for one’s parents can bring certain rewards. A women whose mother-in-law had Alzheimer’s disease and required considerable care explained how, “. . . even though she still gets in her ‘moods,’ . . . she loves to cook big old dinners . . .”[50] Another caregiver explained: “Sometimes you even feel like, well, you’re exhausted emotionally after one conversation. But then the next one, they’ll have some insight for you about dealing with your kids or something. So it’s still, you know, it’s still a really dynamic and giving-both-ways relationship.”[51]

At some point during middle adulthood for most people, this relationship with parents, whether harmonious or strained, ends when a parent dies. Only 10 percent of twenty-five-year-olds have experienced the death of a parent, but by age fifty-five, 50 percent of us have lost both parents, and by age sixty-two this figure goes up to 75 percent.[52] In one survey of midlife adults who had experienced the death of a parent, most reported that the death changed their outlook on life.[53] As Linda Waite, director of the Center on Aging at the University of Chicago describes it, “There’s the feeling that you’re the next in line, and there’s nothing between

you and the abyss."[54] Seeing parents die can bring up all kinds of issues from the past, including positive memories of being cared for and loved as well as negative memories of a parent's abuse or lack of availability. When my own father died two years ago at the age of eighty-seven, here were only a few of the emotions I experienced: the sadness of a little boy losing his father, relief at the fact that he no longer walked the earth to terrify me (he had frequently exploded in rage at me during my childhood), forgiveness for his defects, fondness for his love of music, respect for his spiritual love of perfection, tension for that same love of perfection, regret for not having had a normal father-son relationship.

In a certain sense, parents were our gods and goddesses in early childhood and it can be very hard to watch a god die. According to author and psychologist Alexander Levy, "Parents provide a unique spot on this planet, which is called 'home,' where we can return, if we need to, to be loved and to feel that we belong . . . After parents die, it's gone." The unfathomable loss of that "spot called home," regardless of its location or the quality of what actually occurred there when parents were living, is a recurrent theme in many parental bereavement stories. Levy cites the example of Jason, a fifty-eight-year-old one-time battlefield medic who worked with soldiers who had had an arm or leg amputated yet who continued to experience a "phantom limb" after it had been cut off, feeling an itch or sensation where there was no limb. Jason noted that after his parents died, he would begin to call them on the phone to share an anecdote, only to discover that their number was disconnected. "Like the amputees . . . he often reaches to scratch what's missing, and is surprised, each time, to discover nothing there."[55]

THE DAWNING OF ELDER WISDOM

One crucial factor in successfully navigating through these life changes is having a healthy and active mind. Alzheimer's disease begins to take its toll at this stage of life, with 0.6 percent of people aged sixty-five to sixty-nine, and 1 percent of people aged seventy to seventy-four developing the disorder each year (this figure goes up to 8.4 percent after eighty-five). Others develop mild cognitive impairment (MCI), a nondementia memory-related condition (not related to the "senior moments" common to this age) that may precede the development of full-blown Alzheimer's disease.[56] A

key to battling these conditions involves keeping the mind active throughout one's life. Columbia University neuropsychologist Yaakov Stern writes, "Some people—who are better educated, more active in work and leisure activities—seem to hold off developing the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease longer, despite having the same brain pathology as those who show symptoms earlier."[57] As noted in the chapter on early childhood, learning experiences create new dendrites, which in turn multiplies the number of synapses or connections available for transmitting information throughout the brain. Individuals who pursue a course of lifelong learning maximize their synaptic connections. All other things being equal, if and when Alzheimer's disease or similar dementias related to aging occur, a more highly educated person will likely have a surplus of brain connections or neural networks to take over for damaged areas.[58]

New and surprising research suggests that from our early fifties to our late seventies there is an *increase* both in the density of dendrites, and in the *length* of individual dendrites in certain parts of the neocortex.[59] In addition, scientists have recently discovered that the brain continues to make new brain cells well into old age.[60] NYU neuropsychologist Elkhonon Goldberg points out that exposure to novel learning experiences creates neural networks that form the basis for expertise and intuition in life. These networks accumulate with life experience and may form the basis for what we call wisdom in old age.[61] This is the wisdom that comes from having banked a lot of life experience over the years, and thus being able to see through illusions and grasp the truer nature of things. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once noted that in youth we see the dazzling embroidery of life from the front, while in old age we see the stitchwork from behind.[62] A middle-aged research subject put it this way: "You feel you have lived long enough to have learned a few things that nobody can learn earlier. That's the reward . . . and also the excitement. I now see things in books, in people, in music, that I couldn't see when I was younger . . . It's a form of ripening that I attribute largely to my present age."[63]

Part of what characterizes cognitive growth in mature adulthood is the way in which heart and head become more balanced. Along with greater insight comes a more positive feeling toward others and a warmer attitude about life in general. One longitudinal study of aging noted that as members

grew older, they were more forgiving, more able to meet adversity with cheerfulness, and less likely to take offense from others. This may be an important reason why people in middle age are particularly well suited to serve as judges, referees, and political leaders.[64] Another study comparing the facial expressions of people under fifty and over fifty as they recounted emotionally charged experiences in their lives revealed that older individuals were in general more emotionally expressive, and displayed more instances of complex feelings, exhibiting contrasting emotions—such as sadness and joy, or bitterness and sweetness—with a single look.[65]

Middle age may be the first stage of life when a dysfunctional upbringing in childhood no longer has such a devastating impact on our lives. ". . . unhappy childhoods become less important with time . . ." says life span researcher George Vaillant.[66] Practically speaking, people in mature adulthood increasingly choose to use their time constructively. In contrast to younger adults who may seek to advance their lives with a wide range of social contacts and then experience the conflict that generally accompanies these choices, older adults prefer to spend more time with just a few good friends in situations that minimize conflict and maximize the number of emotionally meaningful experiences they can have.[67] Time is of the essence to middle-agers since they feel it literally whizzing by compared to younger adults. There is a good mathematical reason for this: One year in the life of a two-year-old is 50 percent of her total existence on earth, while one year for a fifty-year-old is only 2 percent of her life span. Time goes by especially quickly for individuals who have created mental cubbyholes for every single aspect of existence, and no longer see, or *remember,* the richness of human experience.

OPENING TO LATER LIFE SPIRITUALITY

Perhaps in reaction to this, people in mature adulthood increasingly seek to turn inward in search of timeless truths. Gerontologist Bernice Neugarten referred to this quality of later life as "interiority" or the growing sense of a deep inner life, a life *of substance.* If we haven't already made an inward spiritual or existential journey in midlife, by mature adulthood we realize that there are fewer things that we can control as individuals. We become more aware of our small place in the vast cosmos, and with this realization comes the emergence of a larger sense of self that has a vital relationship

with the personal and collective unconscious. As Jungian analysts Jeffrey Satinover and Lenore Thomson Bentz have pointed out, “The enlargement of personality that can occur in the second half of life is almost universally experienced as a diminishment of one’s own egotistical sense of importance and a growing awareness of the presence of God.”[68]

Sometimes this growing into spirituality in mature adulthood can be sudden and dramatic. Emanuel Swedenborg was a Swedish scientist, inventor, and philosopher who underwent a powerful spiritual crisis and transpersonal opening when he was in his mid-fifties. He began seeing visions of a spiritual world where he talked with angels and experienced the delights of heaven and the agonies of hell. He believed that he was being directed by Jesus Christ to reveal the doctrine of his second coming. In his journals he wrote, “I saw . . . in vision that fine bread on a plate was presented to me; which was a sign that the Lord Himself will instruct me since I have now come first into the condition that I know nothing, and all preconceived judgments are taken away from me; which is where learning commences; namely, first to be a child and thus be nursed into knowledge. . . .”[69] Swedenborg spent the next twenty-seven years writing and teaching about his mystical beliefs.

Carl Jung, who was influenced by Swedenborg’s work, had his own powerful spiritual awakening in mature adulthood. At the age of sixty-nine, Jung broke his foot and subsequently suffered a heart attack. As he was being given oxygen and injections, he had a vision of the globe of the earth bathed in a blue light and saw incredible vistas stretching from Europe to India. During what appeared to be a near-death experience, he entered a Hindu temple hovering in empty space and received a visit from his doctor who appeared as an archetypal Greek chieftain telling him that he had to return to earth. In the weeks following these visions, Jung began experiencing feelings of ecstasy and had nighttime archetypal visions. In his autobiography Jung wrote: “I felt as though I were floating in space, as though I were safe in the womb of the universe—in a tremendous void, but filled with the highest possible feelings of happiness. ‘This is eternal bliss,’ I thought, ‘This cannot be described; it is far too wonderful!’”[70] Both Jung and Swedenborg had previously thought about and written a great deal about spiritual and existential issues, but these mature adult experiences

provided them with a sense of clarity and certainty about the spiritual world, a feeling that remained with them for the rest of their lives.[71]

For many other people, mature adulthood represents a time when they are just starting to get an inkling that there are deeper truths waiting to be discovered. After having perhaps experienced illness, the death of loved ones, the culmination of one's career, or upheavals in the lives of sons and daughters, the space has been cleared for the beginnings of a new life based on something other than one's individual ego. Psychotherapist Doree Lynn quotes a sixty-three-year-old female client who said, "Although I entered therapy to try to come to terms with so many possibilities I never considered before, such as my failing health, my dislike of my body which no longer holds its shape, my fear of being alone should my husband Sam die before me, and, of course, my own potential death, the truth is that I never really expected to feel so peaceful and serene as I aged. I think it has to do with my new interest in spirituality and what meaning it holds for me. I have found myself going to church again after a lapse of many years. I'm still not sure I believe in God, but I do seem to believe in something greater than myself."[72] Whether this new shift in perspective emerges as a dramatic change in lifestyle, or as a vague but growing presence of some new dimension in one's life, it presages an even greater transformation in the years ahead. In the next chapter, we'll examine how the physical limitations of late adulthood and the realities of approaching death compel us to reckon with these larger forces of existence in a more conclusive way than ever before.

THE GIFT OF MATURE ADULTHOOD: BENEVOLENCE

In June of 2006, the greatest act of philanthropy in history occurred when Warren Buffett, the second richest individual in the world, agreed to give away most of his $44 billion fortune to a foundation started by Bill Gates, the richest person in the world. This event has significance for the field of human development because it illustrates the level of *benevolence* that is possible for people in mature adulthood. Fifty-year-old Bill Gates and seventy-six-year-old Warren Buffett span the entire length of this stage of life. Were it not for the generosity of people in this age group, the world would endure much more poverty, disease, and ignorance than it does today.

And it is not just rich philanthropists who show their benevolence. Most people become grandparents during mature adulthood, and their reputation is well known for showering gifts, privileges, encouragement, and guidance on their grandkids. Other people in this age bracket volunteer their time on grand juries and school boards, or devote countless hours to community organizations that support the needs of individuals at all stages of life. During this time period it simply becomes *easier* to be benevolent since this is the peak age for the accumulation of wealth, and because it is a period in life when one generally has both the good health and the time to devote to worthy causes.

Benevolence is a quality that can be expressed at any age. Examples include: an eight-year-old showing a six-year-old how to ride a bike, a young adult taking time out on weekends to mentor a troubled adolescent, and an eighty-five-year-old slipping a ten-dollar bill into a birthday card for a great-granddaughter. You don't need to be a billionaire to be benevolent. You don't need oodles of spare time to demonstrate your giving nature. Five minutes calling a sick friend or relative can bring a smile to a face. Everyone has some expertise that they can share with the world, whether it's baking pies, framing houses, packing boxes, teaching English, or any of a thousand other skills. The only thing that is absolutely required is a willingness to open your heart to the possibilities that exist around you every day for helping others. Essentially, we all need to find our "inner mature adult," regardless of age, so that those around us will be able to benefit from whatever benevolence we have to give. In this way, we can make the world a better place for our having been in it.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT MATURE ADULTHOOD

FOR YOURSELF

- Exercise regularly, don't smoke, drink in moderation, eat well, and keep your mind active to help ensure that your later adult years are as healthy as possible.
- Plan in detail how you'd like to spend your retirement years (including information about work, travel, study, leisure, or other preferences).
- Organize your financial affairs (if you haven't already done so) to ensure that you have sufficient financial security during your

mature and late adulthood.

For Friends and Family

- Help put together a retirement celebration, “croning” ritual, or celebration of elderhood for a friend or relative who is going through an important transition in his or her middle adulthood years.
- Seek out the advice of a wise older individual whom you know for help with personal difficulties you might be going through that would benefit from the wisdom of experience.
- Encourage an older friend or family member who is stagnating after retirement to engage in study and travel (through Road Scholar [formerly Elderhostel] or similar organizations), or to participate in volunteer activities or other generative experiences.

For the Community

- Contribute financially to organizations (hospitals, medical centers, research associations) that are working toward finding cures for diseases that typically strike in middle adulthood and later, such as the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and/or the American Lung Association.
- Support businesses and organizations that hire adults aged fifty and older.
- Foster the development of programs in your community that encourage volunteerism among older adults in schools, clinics, courts, and other public institutions (e.g., Experience Corps, SERVE, etc.).

CHAPTER 11

Late Adulthood

APPROACHING THE HORIZON

To be seventy is like climbing the Alps. You reach a snow-covered summit and see beyond you the deep valley stretching miles and miles away, and before you other summits higher and whiter which you may have the strength to climb or you may not. Then you sit down and meditate and wonder which it will be.

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW[1]

In ancient Hindu society when a man reached an age when his hair began to turn white, his skin started to wrinkle, and his sons and daughters gave birth to their own children, this was a signal to begin a new stage of life. He was instructed by the laws of Manu to leave his household responsibilities and enter the forest, where he was to build a fire and perform rituals to the gods as part of a growing preoccupation with a spiritual life. After a time, even this stage was to be abandoned, and the old man was instructed to renounce all worldly goods and activities and travel naked or dressed only in a robe as a beggar in search of liberation.

Such a sanctified prescription for living was impractical for most Hindus. They sought instead a modified approach to these ancient laws. Many Hindus of both sexes discovered that a more realistic way to follow the spirit of these laws was to begin gradually withdrawing from an active worldly life and start devoting more time to contemplation, meditation, and the study of sacred texts as they got older. Today, this tradition still lives on in many parts of India. One study of aging in a northern Indian Bengali village, for example, reported that old age there is characterized by a

preoccupation with ways to cut the strings of *Maya*, those attachments to people, places, and things that bind us to this illusory world and to the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Elder Bengali villagers take up celibacy, give away belongings, and make pilgrimages to holy sites in an attempt to loosen the bindings of Maya and prepare for death.[2]

This sacred approach to late adulthood is very different from the aging scenario generally supported by contemporary Western culture. Rather than entering into a stage of life that acknowledges one's own insignificance in the cosmos, many aging people in the West look for ways to extend their worldly lives into an indefinite future. Instead of beginning a process of disengagement with the world, Westerners tend to want to put off being old for as long as possible.

The idea that we can live healthy lives far past the biblical three score and ten years has been at least partially supported by medical science, which has made it possible for more and more people to live healthy lives into their eighties, nineties, and beyond. In fact, the pool of those who live past 100—the centenarians of society—has been increasing by leaps and bounds. Currently, there are about seventy thousand centenarians in the United States. The U.S. Census Department predicts that this number will increase almost thirty-fold to 834,000 by the year 2050.[3] And among the dozen or so projects that are currently studying people over 100, several suggest that if you can make it past the diseases of middle age, then the eighties and beyond can be a time of relatively robust health. Medical expenses, which peak for those sixty to sixty-nine, in fact, actually drop for those 85 to 105.[4] "The centenarians I have met have, with few exceptions, reported that their 90s were essentially problem-free," said Thomas Perls, a Harvard geriatrician who heads the New England Centenarian Study. "Many were employed, sexually active, and enjoyed the outdoors and the arts. They basically carried on as if age were not an issue."[5] Demographers are now starting to count the numbers of "supercentenarians"—people over the age of 110.

DO WE REALLY HAVE TO DIE?

This expansion of the life cycle has led some to wonder whether we need to die at all. The quest for eternal life in the body is certainly not a new project. For thousands of years, Chinese Taoists have searched for the

secrets of immortality in the control of breathing and diet, and the use of reputedly magical substances such as cinnabar and ginseng.[6] The ancient Greek poet Hesiod spoke of a golden age in humanity's past when mortals never aged. We've also grown up with legends of Shangri-la and the Fountain of Youth filling our imaginations with the possibility of living forever. This has led a few respectable scientists and thinkers, as well as a horde of savvy entrepreneurs, to suggest that the right combination of exercise, diet, meditation, rejuvenation formulas, and genetic engineering may be able to indefinitely prolong life. Biogerontologist Aubrey de Grey, for example, believes it is possible for humans to live thousands of years, and has initiated a project called "Engineered Negligible Senescence" to find ways to permanently reverse the aging process.[7] Inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil suggests that if you can just stay alive for another fifty years, technology will have advanced to the point where you can live forever.[8]

Such claims, however, have met with sharp criticism from the mainstream scientific community. In one strongly worded manifesto published in the *Scientific American*, three scientists wrote: "No currently marketed intervention—none—has yet proved to slow, stop or reverse human aging, and some can be downright dangerous . . . anyone purporting to offer an anti-aging product today is either mistaken or lying."[9] Most scientists now believe that there are biological constraints that limit the human life span to a maximum of around 120 years. There are a number of theories for why we age and eventually have to die. One theory proposes that human DNA and other components of life in human cells are exposed to an accumulation of random damage that eventually exceeds the body's own self-repair capabilities. Highly reactive molecules called free radicals, which contain unpaired electrons frantically seeking their mates, damage human cells and are often pointed to as a particular culprit in this wear-and-tear theory. It may be that individuals who live to ripe old ages have genes that limit the activity of these free radicals. Another theory suggests that human cells can only divide a finite number of times. Genetic research indicates that each time a cell divides, the end section of each chromosome —called the telomere—becomes a little shorter. Like the burning of a candle, when the telomere eventually runs out of wick, so to speak, the cell no longer can divide and it dies. While the human body produces a chemical called telomerase that can lengthen the telomere (it keeps the

length of chromosomes constant in egg and sperm cells throughout life), it is also responsible for the growth of cells in cancer. Though it has been used to extend the life span of fruit flies, its use as a way to prolong the human life span is still problematic.

FACING OUR FRAGILITY IN LATE ADULTHOOD

Even if we *were* able to extend human life to 150, or even 1,500 years of age, eventually the life clock must run down and the human body must die. In late adulthood we have to face this fact more immediately and intimately than at any other stage of life. Most people in old age see the evidence of their body crumbling before their very eyes on a daily basis. Visual difficulties that are not corrected by eyeglasses increase sharply in the late seventies and eighties. By the age of eighty, 40 percent of all women have had at least one spinal fracture.[10] One out of four men past eighty require treatment of urinary complications caused by an enlarged prostate.[11] By age eighty-five, only one person in twenty is fully mobile.[12] For the majority of the very old, things that younger people take for granted, like taking a bath, opening a jar of pickles, or walking to the neighborhood store, are fraught with difficulty and risk due to failing eyesight and hearing loss, loss of muscle mass, stiffening of joints through osteoarthritis, and brittleness of bones through osteoporosis. As one elderly woman put it: “Every morning I wake up in pain. I wiggle my toes. Good. They still obey. I open my eyes. Good. I can still see. Everything hurts but I get dressed. I walk down to the ocean. Good. It’s still there. Now my day can start. About tomorrow I never know. After all, I’m eighty-nine. I can’t live forever.”[13]

The mind, too, is at risk, the older you get. By age eighty-five, 16 to 35 percent of Americans suffer severe cognitive impairment, half of it due to Alzheimer’s disease.[14] First identified in 1906 by German psychiatrists Emil Kraepelin and Alois Alzheimer, Alzheimer’s disease is a neurodegenerative disease that causes a progressive loss of cognitive function and results in significant impairment of daily living. It is characterized by abnormal clumps and tangled bundles of fibers in areas of the brain responsible for memory and other mental abilities. People with Alzheimer’s disease in its earliest stages have trouble remembering names, activities, and events, and may also experience difficulty solving simple math problems. In the middle stages of the disease, individuals forget how

to do simple tasks like combing their hair or brushing their teeth, and have problems speaking, reading, or understanding others. In its later stages, people with Alzheimer's disease may become anxious or aggressive, wander away from home, and need around-the-clock care and supervision. People live on average about eight to ten years after diagnosis. Although there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, a number of interventions have been studied that might delay or minimize its symptoms, including a low calorie diet, a regimen of lifelong learning, certain vitamins and herbs (e.g., vitamin E and ginkgo biloba), and a range of prescription medicines. While there are debates about whether Alzheimer's disease is really a disease or just another feature of aging (half of all individuals by the age of ninety have it), it seems clear that people who are diagnosed with it experience a significant loss in their ability to experience life. According to one rehabilitation specialist, "[W]hat seems lost in the mind of the Alzheimer patient is that very detail—the bitter aftertaste of coffee, a fork laid on a plate, the sound of the kitchen door latch falling into place, that accumulation of concrete experience by which we know life . . . [W]hat seems to be lost to the Alzheimer victim, piece by piece, is sense experience, the concrete particulars of the past, until there is only the present, blurred, incomprehensible."[15] This recalls Shakespeare's evocation of late adulthood: "Last scene of all, / That ends this strange eventful history, / Is second childishness and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."[16]

One of the greatest fears among the elderly is that serious illness or disability will make it impossible to do everyday tasks like climb stairs, dress without help, or go to the bathroom unassisted. A survey of women seventy-five years of age and older revealed that nearly all were willing to trade off almost their entire life expectancy to avoid a hip fracture that would result in being admitted to a nursing facility.[17] In other words, they'd rather die than go into a nursing home. If and when that fateful day comes, total dependency on others looms as a frightening prospect. One physician writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* expresses this from the caregivers' point of view, noting that a day finally comes for many adult children of aging parents when they are confronted with behaviors that require some kind of immediate response: "We simply have to do something. . . . He's always knocking things over and falling . . . she thinks I'm her dead sister."[18]

As a result, many elderly people are sent to nursing homes, continuing-care facilities, or other assisted-living settings.[19] Almost a quarter of those eighty-five and older and about half of those ninety-five and older are in nursing homes. Anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff has noted that unlike at birth or adolescence, we have few rites of passage for the elderly as they move into this new phase of dependency on others.[20] There are no "coming-of-age" ceremonies that mark the day when they finally give up the family home, or transfer property and privilege to their children, or relinquish their driver's license, or enter into an institution. Instead, these things just happen to them without their being able to grieve the losses and without their being able to acknowledge the changes that are happening to them. Once in a nursing home, the elderly may be treated with little dignity or even abused. According to a congressional study, one nursing home in three has severe deficiencies that endanger people's health or their lives. Its author, U.S. Representative Henry Waxman, said: "We found examples of residents being punched, choked or kicked by staff members or other residents."[21]

Even if they are lucky and instead "age in place" (e.g., live in their own homes and apartments), many elderly risk entering a twilight zone of invisibility and experiencing derision in a society that values productivity and youth, qualities that are in short supply among the aged. We have a ready-made set of pejorative terms to describe people in late adulthood who block our way walking down the street, keep us waiting impatiently at checkout counters in supermarkets, or veer into our lane on a freeway: gaffer, old fogey, codger, geezer, galoot, old fart, curmudgeon, fuddy-duddy. In Australia, the elderly are called "wrinklies." In Japan, the young call an old man an *umeboshi baba*: a dried old plum. Very old people are significantly devalued in market-based economies like ours. They're not going to be buying luxury homes, fancy cars, or other status symbols since their priorities have changed from impressing their neighbors to appreciating or coping with the little time they have left on earth. They're not up on the latest trends of fashion and culture since they think more about the past than of what will be trendy long after they're dead. As noted earlier, the very old even use fewer health care services than middle agers who are more likely to get expensive heart bypass operations and plastic surgery. So from a marketing point of view, what good are they? Add to this litany of social negatives the fact that old people remind us of death,

something most people don't even want to think about. As Shakespeare observed: ". . . men shut their doors against a setting sun."[22]

It's no wonder, then, that rates of depression are higher in late adulthood than at any other stage of life except adolescence. Although community surveys reveal only 3 percent of elderly people qualify for a diagnosis of major depression, almost 20 percent are found to have significant depressive symptoms, and as many as half of the elderly in long-term care suffer from depression at some time.[23] Old people who take care of spouses suffering from dementia are at especially high risk for depression, as are those who have lost a spouse during the previous year (the mean age for becoming a widow is sixty-six, and for becoming a widower is sixty-nine). Suicide rates are higher among the elderly than for any other age group. Those most at risk, older white men, have six times the national average suicide rate. Tragically, depression remains untreated in up to 90 percent of depressed elders.[24] Studies suggest that 20 percent of old people who kill themselves have visited their doctors *that very day,* 40 percent in the same week, and 70 percent within a month of their suicide. Even among those elderly who do not commit suicide, untreated depression increases the death rate by more than 50 percent independent of their physical health, and raises the risk of dying after a heart attack by a factor of five.[25] It appears that physical illness and depression interact in a downward spiral reinforcing each other: Persistent or severe illness raises the risk of depression, which increases the risk for further illness, leading to more depression, and so on.[26] The sense of hopelessness and futility experienced by many older people has been articulated by French philosopher Jean Amery, who writes, "[Old people] look into their space to see what it will be like after them: a house where children and their children's children will be active and will work; a tombstone, gray and powerful will testify for them . . . but the house will deteriorate and the grandchildren will be scattered to all the winds . . . House and home . . . and tomb, everything will be like the nights of love and pain of the deceased: as good as if they had never existed."[27]

HONORING THE HISTORICAL MIND

That the elderly should despair as they do and be denigrated by the society they have supported for much of their lives is a tragedy of King Lear proportions. After having spent their lives acquiring experiences, storing up

knowledge, and gaining wisdom, they look up from their hard-won collection of inner riches to discover that nobody around them seems to care. Yet, here in these time-ripened personalities lies a treasure of incomparable value: the historical mind. Old people have direct and immediate access to memories of long past events that sophisticated historians can only guess at with their theories, books, and lectures. When the oldest documented person in the world, the Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment, died in 1997 at the age of 122, it was revealed that she had met Vincent van Gogh as a child. What a marvel to contemplate that someone in our own time should have touched history in this intimate way! Many of our own elders have had experiences, though perhaps less dramatic or distant in time, that are nevertheless significant connections with the atmosphere of other times, inaccessible to the rest of us: experiences of past wars, revolutions, depressions, cultural upheavals, and contact with great individuals of the past.

Consider, for example, your own grandparents or great-grandparents who attended lectures or concerts as children where they saw and heard famous actors, politicians, musicians, orators, or writers who are now long dead. Eighty-five-year-olds living today (this was written in 2007) were entering their twenties at a time when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Orson Welles's film *Citizen Kane* was released, and the word *antibiotic* was first coined. More compellingly, they lived through times that had quite a distinctly different feel in contrast to today's world: times where everything from outdoor lighting and telephone communication to cultural values and intellectual trends were qualitatively different from current experience. Here, for example, are some reminiscences of Carolyn Peery, a ninety-nine-year-old African American, who shared her memories and some old photographs with cultural historian Studs Terkel: ". . . Here's a picture of my mother-in-law. She was born into slavery. She was six years old when freedom was declared. . . . My mother-in-law remembered seeing the slaves get behind the door, jumping up and down, saying 'God bless Mr. Lincoln. God bless Mr. Lincoln.'"[28]

Individuals in late adulthood have historical access not just to one era, but to a succession of eras and the events and trends that accompanied them, which gives them a sense of the big picture. Younger people are awed and shaken up as they go through events for the first time, whereas older people have seen them come and seen them go, and then seen them come

once again. They have a longer view of history and a broader scope on current events. They hold the memory of a culture, its mores, its values, its treasures, and its misfortunes better than anyone else. There is no way to replicate this kind of expertise at an earlier age. You can't manufacture experience out of nothing. You've got to do the time. And people in late adulthood have done the time. That's one of the reasons why traditional cultures and their mythic heroes have so often consulted the very old for advice on important matters; why, for example, Agamemnon turned to the aged Nestor for advice on winning the Trojan War, or why Odysseus followed the advice of the ageless blind seer Teiresias for getting back home to Ithaca.

Significantly, studies in cognitive science suggest that while the short-term memories of the elderly may deteriorate as they age, particularly when dementias are present, their long-term memories, especially for far distant events in their past, actually become more acute in some cases.[29] Though they may have difficulty remembering what they had for breakfast that morning, they can vividly recall the color of the leaves the autumn when they went off to college as a youth. Arthur Freeman was an eighty-six-year-old former civil service employee who suffered from severe dementia, experiencing delusions, violent outbursts, and short-term memory problems. But when asked about his childhood, he began to share how he played by the river when he was a child: "Yes we had both sides of the river itself . . . there was one part there were . . . er . . . trees, we played in there, and there was stones between the trees and the grass. There was stones running with the water. Oh many times we plunged across the . . . water . . . the bricks, stones piled like this. Plenty of bricks like that. We were running across those, across the river."[30] Although riddled with syntactic and semantic errors, Freeman's narrative shows a detailed memory for long passed events.

Researchers refer to this capacity of older adults to remember events early in their lives as the "reminiscence bump" and report that these memories often tend to cluster around events in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. These were the stages of life when the individual was forming a personal identity and represent those times when they essentially became themselves as contributing members of society. It could be that this renewed memory among elders for seminal events in their youth confers advantages to cultures or even to the species as a whole. Those who possess

this trait can pass on vital information to younger people before they die about how they created themselves in youth, and in the process share how they learned to maintain the coherence of their culture. Interestingly, recent studies suggest that the memories of individuals in late adulthood are actually sharper in countries where the elderly are highly valued, such as China, compared to those cultures where the old are neglected or denigrated.[31] At the same time, vocabulary skills continue to stay robust until the early eighties. In one study, people at age eighty-one performed at a higher level on vocabulary tests than people at age twenty-five.[32] Hence, both memory for distant events and the ability to communicate these memories verbally are optimal in late adulthood for many individuals. This may explain why very old people are so often the storytellers and cultural guardians of society. As Simone de Beauvoir writes about the people of Bali: "The elderly men work little: they talk and chew betel. But they have many duties—they direct the village assembly, practice medicine, tell tales, and teach the young poetry and art . . . Their opinion is asked on every subject."[33]

THE SPIRITUAL LIVES OF ELDERS

Liberated from the workaday roles of conventional society, people in late adulthood are free to stand apart from the society and serve as the feisty Socrates, the stormy Jeremiah, or the healer-crone Mother Teresa of their culture. As one eighty-six-year-old woman stated: "Now I don't care a bit about what people think . . . I dare to go out biking or walking in [X-town] wearing torn stockings, I couldn't do that before. . . . Sometimes I think, but I really can't do this, you know . . . but I do it anyway."[34] New avenues of creativity are opened up as elders begin to realize latent potentials and remember forgotten abilities. Perhaps it is here, almost at life's end, when the light of destiny originally silenced by the angel of forgetfulness in prebirth finally begins to shine once again. Jungian analyst Florida Scott-Maxwell writes of this newly born power discovered late in life: "[a] secret we carry is that though drab outside-wreckage to the eye . . . inside we flame with a wild life that is almost incommunicable."[35] It may have been this fire that prompted Grandma Moses to begin painting at seventy-eight, Kin Narita and Gin Kanie to launch a singing career in Japan at age 100, and Su Juxian to publish his first book of poetry in China at age 104. As

author Joan M. Erikson, the wife of Erik Erikson, put it: “I am profoundly moved, for I am growing old and feel shabby, and suddenly great riches present themselves and enlighten every part of my body and reach out to beauty everywhere.”[36]

Approaching the end of life, people in late adulthood have an unparalleled view of life’s horizon as they peer into the mysteries beyond. Old age brings with it access to a wider scope of being; to the collective unconscious of the psyche; to the transpersonal realms of human existence. Among the Fon of Benin in West Africa the oldest living man is said to be “between the two worlds of the living and the dead.”[37] In a study of western China completed in the 1930s, the aged of both sexes were found to be intensely interested in their afterlives, cultivating spiritual knowledge in preparation for ancestorhood.[38] The myths and stories of many cultures speak of this opening to spirituality late in life. Psychiatrist Allan B. Chinen has examined fairy tales from world literature that depict older persons living in great outer poverty who by chance stumble upon something supernatural. He shares, for example, the Japanese tale of Princess Moonlight, a story about an old couple who find a child embedded in a stalk while they are cutting bamboo. They raise her as their own and she grows up to become the most beautiful and radiant lady in the land. Men come from all over to woo her, including the emperor himself, but she refuses them and finally reveals to the couple that she is really a celestial being and must return to heaven. They spend the rest of their days looking up at her shining among the stars.[39] This enchanting tale reminds me of the life of renowned author Iris Murdoch, who after developing Alzheimer’s disease, used to enjoy watching the British children’s TV show *Teletubbies.* At the end of each episode, a joyful baby’s face appears in the sky as the sun. Her husband, John Bayley, reported: “Iris always returned its beaming smile.”[40]

Young children and the very old share the experience of living at life’s borders where the transpersonal life is more active than at any other time. As a result, people in late adulthood often recover a spiritual outlook on life by going back to remembrances of experiences in childhood. As an eighty-six-year-old woman related to a gerontology researcher, “You go back to childhood almost daily. It comes without reflection. I talked to a good friend about this . . . We both go back to the town where we grew up [in our thoughts] . . . Childhood means much more than one thinks. I go back to it

all the time."[41] Jungian analyst Frances Wickes wrote about a dream she had when she was just a three-year-old that continued to influence her into her nineties: "I am in a high meadow, unknown yet strangely familiar. In its center is Behemoth: huge, terrifying, evil. By his side, unafraid and rooted in its own serenity, is a single bluet, that smallest flower of meadow or woodland, tiny, fragile, perfect in its four-petaled innocence." This dream, she wrote, "lived on in the psyche of an old, old woman until it blossomed into a faith by which, in her old age she lived; a faith in life itself, to which she sought to give testimony."[42]

Unfortunately, caregivers usually ignore these transpersonal experiences in late adulthood, just as parents and teachers dismiss transpersonal experiences in early childhood. In fact, most of the strengths that we've enumerated above as part of late adulthood—the historical mind, the broad sweep of perspective, the active storytelling abilities, the cultural guardianship, and the spiritual or transpersonal vision—in other words, the truly vital functions that old people have traditionally carried out in many cultures, are viewed as insignificant in the modern Western world. With more and more people reaching older ages in our culture, the singular wisdom that was the prerogative of those rare individuals who made it into old age in earlier times has lost its cachet, just as a precious metal or gem loses much of its value when it becomes possible to synthesize mass quantities of it. Moreover, the historical or cultural mind of the elderly has less value in a culture that turns increasingly to video, the Internet, or other media for high-impact reporting of historical and cultural events. Also, we live in a culture that is always changing, so the need to have elders around to maintain the sense of continuity in a long cultural tradition has largely disappeared. Finally, because we live in a materialistic culture—one where greed rules even where the churches are strong—there is little interest in the spiritual experiences of old people that may transcend conventional religious traditions and beliefs. Reflecting on the ways in which the wisdom of our elders has been marginalized, we have to ask ourselves, may it not be our *culture* that is deteriorating more than our elders? And if this is the case, then what great treasures are being lost because we ignore what they have to say to us?

SUMMING UP A LIFE

The greatest gift we can give to our elders is our attention: We simply must learn to *listen* to them once again. More than thirty years ago, psychiatrist Robert Butler coined the term *life review* to describe what he believed was a naturally occurring and universal mental process among the elderly to revive past experiences. He regarded the life review as the attempt of the very old to reintegrate memories, especially those involving conflict, into their current lives.[43] When I was a teacher in my mid-twenties, I used to visit an elderly French-Canadian woman named Bella who lived alone in her apartment in Montreal. She would cook me dinner, offer Cinzano to drink afterward (I declined, being a nondrinker), and then proceed to tell me about her life. Much of it had been difficult: Her son had died young, her husband had been much older and distant, she had regretfully left her spiritual teacher. And yet, through the telling of her story, she seemed to be working toward some kind of reconciliation and acceptance of her conflicted life.

Unfortunately, most of us regard the seemingly endless reminiscing of old people as a nuisance. We'd like to cut our visits to parents or grandparents short so that we can tend to our busy lives. Nevertheless, they persist in their ruminations about a moment of triumph or terror in a foreign war, or the time they missed a promotion with General Electric, or the day they received an award for their prize petunias at the state fair. Sometimes we even mistake their going on about the past with the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. And yet the gift of attention that we give to our elders can be very healing. Having reached the end of their lives, people in late adulthood ask themselves: Did my life have any meaning? According to Erik Erikson, the answers they receive from this question will help determine whether they feel a sense of integrity about their lives, or instead, fall into *despair.* If a person can accept his life as something that *had to be*, says Erikson, then it becomes possible to face death without fear.[44]

Sometimes this acceptance is given visible form in a significant way at the very end of life as a kind of "swan song." This expression arises out of the Greek legend that the swan, which doesn't actually sing, is capable of giving voice to something like a song near the end of its life. Socrates believed that the song was a joyful one because it signaled that the swan was soon to join Apollo, the god of poetry and music that it served. At the end of Homer's epic, the father of Odysseus, Laertes, who is now an old

man, dons the armor of his youth and joins his son and grandson in a swan song of last battle. The expression *swan song* has now come to be associated with the last work, or nearly final work, of a poet, composer, artist, or other creative person. It is generally seen as an attempt to sum up their creative lives in works that may be infused with great power or tinged with resignation, serenity, triumph, or acceptance. The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, for example, had a successful career writing symphonies and other works, but apparently produced no new compositions during the last three decades of his life until it was discovered that in his ninety-second year he took up his composer's pen one final time to orchestrate a song from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* entitled, "Come Away, Death."[45] Another example can be seen in the life of African-American dancer and actor Josephine Baker, whose performances captivated Parisian audiences in the 1920s but whose career went into decline in the following decades. In 1975, however, at the age of sixty-eight, she returned to Paris to star in a retrospective show celebrating her fifty years in the theater. The show opened to rave reviews. A week later, she died in bed from a cerebral hemorrhage with glowing newspaper reviews spread around her.

Swan songs also show up in the lives of so-called ordinary people. One beautiful example appears in Akira Kurosawa's magnificent film *Ikiru.* The protagonist is a lifeless bureaucrat who has toiled away in a meaningless job at the Tokyo City Hall for several decades, only to discover late in life that he has terminal stomach cancer. This realization ultimately shocks him into one final redemptive act to make up for his years of shallowness and self-absorption: He helps to create a children's playground on what was once a stagnant pond. Similarly, in the lives of our elderly relatives or friends, a swan song might be a last effort to support a worthy cause, a gift given in one's last days, or a small act of kindness before dying. It may be that in late adulthood such simple acts serve as a way of signaling that a human being has finally achieved some sort of rapprochement with life and with death. With the great adventure of life behind them, and the mystery of the unknown before them, such swan songs may be among the most poignant and precious manifestations of the human condition. We turn to that final mystery now in the next chapter, and examine the human encounter with death.

THE GIFT OF LATE ADULTHOOD: WISDOM

When I was thirteen and lived for a year with my grandmother, I used to mercilessly tease one of my cousins, who would get angry, cry, and stomp around the room in a fury. Instead of scolding me, Nana would give me a compassionate look and say in a kindly way, “Don’t make her look *ugly*!” To this day, I can still hear the precise way in which she pronounced that word, and in that sound I hear the wisdom of my elders speaking. Sadly, it seems that much of the news about the elderly in today’s world is negative, focusing on Alzheimer’s disease, depression, abuse, poverty, and neglect. We seem to have forgotten that in past times, older people were regarded as the repositories of cultural wisdom. By late adulthood, people have done a lot of living. They’ve had successes and failures, made mistakes and discovered solutions, undergone a wide range of life events, and met up with many different types of people along the way. This rich tapestry of experience is mirrored in the aging brain, which holds a wealth of neural networks forged from innumerable interactions with life. These ancient minds see beyond the fads, trends, and moods that captivate the young. They cut through to the deeper moral, aesthetic, and spiritual truths of life. Such wisdom is very much needed in a society that values quick sound bites and snappy one-liners. Instead of dismissing our elders by fitting them into convenient stereotypes of decrepitude, we ought instead to listen to what they have to say to us. Perhaps we will discover that their wisdom slows us down a bit and makes us think about what is really important in life in the long run.

The gift of wisdom is available to us at any time in our lives. We see this wisdom in the young child who asks timeless questions. We see it in the adolescent who desires to penetrate through adult hypocrisy and get to the essential truth of things. We see it in the midlife adult who gains new insight from having reevaluated his past in midcareer. In a sense, we all possess an “inner elder” that helps direct our lives. It’s that part of ourselves that resides above our daily actions and calmly observes what we’re doing against the backdrop of a larger perspective. If we’re inwardly quiet, we can hear wisdom’s voice speaking to us even in moments of turmoil or despair. To help develop our inner wisdom, we can meditate, pray, read texts from sacred traditions, keep a journal of our deepest thoughts, or spend time in nature or other sacred settings. But one of the best ways to discover wisdom

in ourselves is to spend time with people who are themselves wise. And in many cases, it is among the very old that we will find the wisest among us. By paying attention to their words, their glances, and even the most trivial of their actions, we can begin to see what a full life really looks like and use this image of sagacity to help direct the course of our own journey through life.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT LATE ADULTHOOD

FOR YOURSELF

- Look at yourself in a mirror and imagine what you will look like when you are very old.
- Determine what specific risk factors you must eliminate (e.g., smoking, drinking), and what positive life style choices you need to initiate (e.g., exercise, diet) in order to have good health in late adulthood. Then, initiate a consistent plan.
- Make concrete plans to help ensure that you will be well cared for in your final years of life, by considering long term care insurance, making sound financial investments, and investigating the range of living options available to you as you grow old.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Help an elderly family member or friend record her life story in some way through audio or videotape, writings, photos, or a scrapbook of memorabilia.
- Pay visits to elderly friends or relations who are physically, emotionally, or mentally ailing and provide them with cheer, conversation, or silent support.
- Regularly write, call, or send flowers or other tokens of affection to elderly friends or family members who are not living in your area and have few social contacts.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Volunteer to visit the elderly in a nursing home or other assisted living facility, and listen to their stories, sing songs, help with hobbies, or provide other forms of encouragement and support.

- Contribute to organizations that are dedicated to fighting ageism and that support the rights of the elderly.
- Report instances of elder abuse that you may learn about in your community to the appropriate authorities.

CHAPTER 12

Death and Dying

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

Remember me as you draw nigh
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so must you be,
Prepare for death and follow me.

—EPITAPH FOUND ON CONNECTICUT GRAVESTONE (1830)[1]

Once upon a time there was a powerful king named Gilgamesh who ruled over Uruk, a city set between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers in ancient Babylonia. He was very lonely in his greatness until he met Enkidu, an uncivilized man about his own age. With Enkidu in his life, Gilgamesh was very happy, and together they went on a heroic quest to kill Humbaba the Evil One and slay the Bull of Heaven. During their adventures Enkidu was injured and eventually died. Gilgamesh was devastated by the death of his friend. At great peril to himself he crossed over to the far side of the waters of death in search of eternal life so that his friend Enkidu might be resurrected. Arriving at his destination, he was greeted by his ancestor Utnapishtim, who told him about a plant lying at the bottom of a river whose name means “as an old man, man becomes young again.” Utnapishtim told him that this plant would bring his friend back to life. In great anticipation, Gilgamesh rushed to put weights on his feet and descended to the bottom of the river, where he joyously retrieved the magical rose-colored herb. On his journey back home to Uruk, Gilgamesh happened to stop for a rest and took a brief dip in a nearby river. While he

was soaking in the pool, a snake came along and ate the plant that he had left unguarded on the riverbank. Gilgamesh went home with no solution to the problem of death and only the pain of loss for his best friend Enkidu.[2]

Thus ends the tale of Gilgamesh, the oldest major literary work in Western civilization. This story, inscribed on clay tablets, was deciphered by British archeologists in the late 1800s and dates back four thousand years. The story of Gilgamesh strikes a deep chord for those of us who read it so many years later, because Gilgamesh's pain mirrors our own anguish, confusion, and fear about death. The story ultimately offers no salvation, no miracle cure, and no happy ending. Death is defined in this tale as a termination that we must all accept as a part of being human. It is this great fact that ultimately unites every living being. Death, as cultural historian Studs Terkel points out, is the one experience that none of us have had, that all of us *will* have. Thus, we all share a collective uncertainty of what this experience will be, and a universal assurance—covered over as it might be by layers of denial—that it will indeed happen at some point in our lives.

Here's an obvious fact that becomes quite startling if you think about it long enough: Barring a major technological advance or a divine miracle, all six and a half billion people now living on the planet will be dead in one hundred and twenty-five years, if not sooner. And each death will be a personal drama with its own emotions, its own web of social connections (or lack thereof), and its own unique story. Yet all these six and a half billion deaths will come down to the same thing, at least in biological terms. The physical body will stop functioning. It will die, decay, and be disposed of. For each of us, this will occur at a very specific moment sometime in the next several decades. If you wish, you may consult Internet sites that will tabulate your vital statistics—age, gender, health status, and lifestyle—and then proceed to tell you how many years you have left.[3] One site will even provide you with a personalized "death clock" that will show your time slipping away.[4] Even taxes don't hold this level of certainty, although humorist Max Beerbohm suggested that many people won't admit it. He mused, "Even you, unassuming reader, go about with a vague notion that in your case, somehow, the ultimate demand of nature will be waived."[5]

WHY WE DIE

Probably all of us during our lifetimes have experienced some variation of the thought Gilgamesh had: “Wouldn’t it be great if death didn’t exist and we could live forever!” In the last chapter we explored the biological or *body up* reasons for why this is improbable, if not impossible. We’ll explore some existential or *spirit down* reasons for why this *may* be possible in the next chapter. But, for the moment, consider this question: Would it *really* be better never to die? The ancient Greeks answered this question in their mythology by telling the story of Tithonus, who was the brother of Priam, the future king of Troy. Eos, the goddess of the Dawn, fell in love with the human Tithonus and asked Zeus to grant him immortality, which Zeus proceeded to do. But she forgot to ask for eternal youth for him, and so Tithonus got older and grayer and more withered with every passing year until finally, out of mercy or desperation, Eos turned him into a grasshopper, forever begging to die.[6]

The message seems to be: It just isn’t *natural* to live forever. After all, what are you going to do with all that time on your hands? It’s part of the mystery of existence for things to be born, to grow, to wither, and then to die, only to be replaced by new life. Take a walk out in nature during springtime. Watch the tender young green plants shoot up around the old stiff and rotting stalks from last season. The death of the old makes way for the birth of the new in an endless cycle in the natural world. Human beings, to the extent that they are a part of the natural world (e.g., part of the *body up* line of development), must likewise grow old and die to make a place for new life. As Tennyson put it: “Old men must die; or the world would grow mouldy, would only breed the past again.”[7] This is the ultimate form of generativity according to Michel de Montaigne: “to give place to others, as others have given place to you.”

To be sure, the world’s populations have never accepted death as a natural event, especially when it occurs in youth. In many myths around the world, death is treated as an unnatural occurrence in the *cosmic* order of things, and we will also examine this side of the story in the next chapter. However, for most of humanity’s history, and still in many places around the world, death has been experienced as a part of the natural flow of life. In Bali, entire towns turn out for daylong cremation ceremonies. In Mexico, people remember the dead with skeletons, candles, and flowers during the annual Día de los Muertos (“Day of the Dead”) festival. In some Arctic

cultures, frail elders in times past willingly offered themselves to be euthanized at public gatherings.

THE HISTORY OF DEATH IN AMERICA

Even in western Europe and America, death was considered a natural and public event for centuries. After the bubonic plague or Black Death of the fourteenth century in Europe, death became a cultural obsession. People wrote books on the art of dying, and a Christian tradition established itself that aspired toward a "noble death." In this ideal, the dying person would make his last glorious confession on his deathbed in the presence of the priest, family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers who happened along. According to social historian Philippe Aires, "The dying man's bedchamber became a public place to be entered freely. At the end of the eighteenth century, doctors who were discovering the first principles of hygiene complained about the overcrowded bedrooms of the dying. In the early nineteenth century, passers-by who met the priest bearing the last sacrament still formed a little procession and accompanied him into the sickroom."[8] These strangers hoped to witness a victory of the Soul over the Devil that might boost their own chances for salvation.

Until the end of the nineteenth century in the United States, virtually everyone died at home, and it was common for groups of women to come into the house after a death and lay out the body for viewing in the family parlor. People wore black armbands, put wreaths on doors, made regular graveside visits, and displayed deathbed pictures and paintings. When someone died in a community, everything stopped for a while so that this experience could be assimilated and integrated. With the beginning of the twentieth century, however, death began to disappear from public view. As methods of combating disease became more technologically proficient, people went to hospitals to die alone. By 1949, half of all U.S. deaths took place in hospitals. Philippe Aires observed, "In the course of the twentieth century, an absolutely new type of dying has made an appearance in some of the most industrialized, urbanized, and technologically advanced areas of the Western world . . . Except for the death of statesmen, society has banished death. In the towns, there is no way of knowing that something has happened . . . Society no longer observes a pause; the disappearance of

an individual no longer affects its continuity. Everything in town goes on as if nobody died anymore."[9]

Although 90 percent of people currently report that they wish to die at home, this seems unlikely for most, since 80 percent of deaths in the U.S. now take place in hospitals.[10] Of this 80 percent, according to surgeon Sherwin Nuland, author of *How We Die*, almost all of them are hidden from the people who were closest to them in their lives.[11] This means that when you die there is a very good chance that you will die in a hospital room surrounded by life-saving machinery with tubes and needles stuck into you and all the expertise of modern science available to you, but without the contact of family members or other loved ones at the moment of your death. "Patients and families often feel abandoned at the end of life," says David Weissman, M.D., director of the palliative medicine program at the Medical College of Wisconsin. "Doctors tell patients there is nothing more they can do for them, but there is."[12]

Chances are good, as well, that you will spend your last days in some pain or in a coma with little opportunity to reflect on the meaning of your life and its passing. In the largest study of dying patients in American hospitals, it was reported that half died with moderate to severe pain that was not relieved by medications, and 40 percent spent at least ten days in a coma attached to a mechanical ventilator or in an intensive care unit separated for the most part from their families.[13] The availability (for those who can afford them) of life-prolonging surgery, chemotherapy, radiation treatments, respirators, CPR, feeding tubes, painkillers, antibiotics, and other miracles of modern science means that many chronically ill people in late adulthood can be kept alive indefinitely regardless of what this may do to the quality of their final days, weeks, or months of life. Doctors are trained to keep treating the illness and never to give up, even when this means that an old person will have to endure pain from surgeries, suffer debilitating side effects from drugs and treatments, and undergo other insults to their body and dignity to the very end of their days.

PREPARING FOR THE FINAL EXIT

Thus, we have a major dilemma. On the one hand, modern medicine has evolved a huge arsenal of technological devices, drugs, and procedures to prolong human life. And a large part of the ethos of a physician is to cure

disease and save lives. On the other hand, as we've already noted, growing old and dying is a natural process. When does it become appropriate to say that an elderly patient is no longer fighting illness, but instead, is involved in the process of dying? Unfortunately, it appears that most medical personnel lack an appropriate framework for answering this question. A 1999 survey by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education revealed that only 4 out of 125 medical schools had a required course on death and dying.[14] Another study indicated that leading medical textbooks failed to treat the subject of death and dying in a frank and honest manner.[15] Further studies have shown that doctors and nurses are reluctant to discuss death with seriously ill patients.[16]

In many cases, medical personnel resort to euphemisms when discussing death. One oncologist expressed his own amazement at this level of denial among his fellow doctors: "The most common metaphor I hear clinicians use when speaking to non-medical personnel and families is 'lost.' 'We lost the patient,' or 'We attempted resuscitation, but lost him anyway.' When I first came to this country, this struck me as rather odd. I wanted to say, 'Well, we didn't really lose your husband. We know where he is, it's just . . . he's not breathing there anymore.'"[17] Terminally ill patients and their families seem similarly reluctant to bring up the subject of dying and death. In one survey, only 14 percent of patients had prepared advance directives indicating when they would prefer to stop receiving life-saving measures and listing the person who would make the decision to terminate life support.[18]

On the other hand, if you've planned ahead, you might be fortunate enough to enter a hospice program and die at home or in some other natural setting surrounded by loved ones. The modern hospice movement was initiated in 1967 at St. Christopher's Hospice in London by Dame Cicely Saunders. There are currently about eight thousand hospices around the world. The hospice philosophy is based upon the belief that dying people should be in a supportive environment, usually at home, and be as free from pain as possible. Dame Saunders's innovation was to provide patients with painkillers *before* they had pain, rather than after the pain starts, or an hour before visiting hours. This palliative care, as it came to be known, was combined with help to the family to provide support for their dying relative, assistance in planning funeral arrangements, and grief therapy for family members of the deceased. Research suggests that hospice patients are more

likely than nonhospice patients to receive more adequate pain relief and that both patients and caregivers are more likely to experience satisfaction from services, especially regarding home care.[19]

In a hospice program counselors will work with you and help you articulate your concerns, needs, and wishes for the last part of your life and its aftermath. They'll assist you in taking care of legal and financial matters, in drawing up living wills specifying how long you'd want to be on life support, what you'd like done with your body, and other postmortem issues. They'll provide emotional and spiritual support, helping you deal with feelings that come up at each stage of the dying process, including making sense out of your life and your death. They'll help you communicate with and even reconcile with loved ones, and assist you in saying good-bye to them when the time is appropriate. They'll also guide you and your family in making funeral arrangements, and attend to other matters after you are dead. Asked how she herself would want to die, Dame Saunders responded, "Everybody else says they want to die suddenly, but I say I'd like to die of cancer, because it gives me time to say I'm sorry, and thank you, and goodbye."[20] She got her wish, dying of cancer at the age of eighty-seven in 2005, at the hospice she herself had founded.

LEARNING ABOUT THE FACTS OF DEATH

Saying good-bye to life may be easier for those who possess a sound knowledge about the realities of physical death. In earlier times people kept reminders of death, or *memento mori*, to help them remember that death comes to everyone. In ancient Rome miniature coffins were sometimes passed among guests at a dinner party as a stimulus to enjoy the present fleeting moment before it slipped away forever. During the death-obsessed Middle Ages, prostitutes and priests alike wore death-head rings, while monks slept in their coffins each night as a constant reminder of their coming fate. Public clocks would be adorned with mottos such as *ultima forsan* ("perhaps the last [hour]") or *vulnerant omnes, ultima necat* ("they all wound, and the last kills"). In modern times we needn't be quite so morbid in our focus on death, but getting to know some of the details about dying and death can help make it less mysterious and frightening. As Carl Jung pointed out in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, ". . .

shrinking away from [death] is something unhealthy and abnormal which robs the second half of life of its purpose."[21]

According to Sherwin Nuland, there is an 85 percent chance that you will die of one or more of the following conditions if you live into late adulthood: cancer, obesity, atherosclerosis, hypertension, adult-onset diabetes, mental deterioration such as Alzheimer's or other dementias, or decreased resistance to infection. The biggest cause of them all is coronary artery disease, which currently kills at least half of all people in the United States. Nuland points out that every life-ending disease or accident, whether it be a heart attack, suicide, brain tumor, stroke, or murder, relies upon one or more of five basic physiological processes: the stoppage of circulation, the inadequate transportation of oxygen to tissues, the flickering out of brain function, the failure of organs, or the destruction of vital centers. "These are the weapons of every horseman of death," says Nuland.[22] The bottom line is air. "Man is an obligate aerobe," according to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates. Without oxygen delivered directly to the brain, each one of us would die within two to four minutes.

Knowing exactly *when* you are dying may be more difficult to pin down. As one dramatist noted, "Death hath ten thousand doors for men to take their exits."[23] Joanne Lynn, director of the Center to Improve Care of the Dying at the George Washington School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Washington, D.C., indicates that only 20 percent of us will die in a phase that is clearly "dying."[24] More likely, there will be a series of chronic diseases, hospitalizations, recoveries, and relapses before the end draws near. Another 20 to 25 percent of Americans will die suddenly, that is within a few hours of onset of symptoms, usually from a heart attack. Toward the very end, you may go through what clinicians call an "agonal phase," otherwise known as "death agonies" or the "death rattle" caused by relaxation of the muscles of the throat. According to Sherwin Nuland, "In the ultimate agonal moments, the rapid onset of final oblivion is accompanied either by the cessation of breathing or by a short series of great heaving gasps; on rare occasions . . . violent tightening of . . . laryngeal muscles into a terrifying bark. Simultaneously, the chest or shoulders will sometimes heave once or twice and there may be a brief agonal convulsion."[25]

The agonal phase is followed by what scientists call "clinical death," which is the interval after the heart has stopped beating, and where there is

no breathing or measurable brain function, but when it's still possible to rescue the person. Finally, if no resuscitation occurs within a handful of minutes, the eyes become dulled, the pupils dilate, the eyeballs flatten out, and you die. Traditionally, the criteria for death was an absence of a heartbeat or the cessation of breathing, but in 1968 this changed to "brain death," defined as: "signs of loss of all reflexes, lack of response to vigorous external stimuli, and absence of electrical activity as shown by a flat electroencephalogram for a sufficient number of hours."[26] It is then that the miracle of physiological life, which started with a single cell and blossomed into 100,000 billion cells by late adulthood, ceases to be.

THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF DYING

While the above description is sobering, there are indications that the act of dying isn't all about pain, distress, and coma, but that it has a positive, and even transcendent dimension. Stephen J. Levine, founder of the Hanuman Foundation Dying Center, a group that assists individuals in their dying process, has witnessed hundreds of deaths and reports, "From our experience with many patients at the time they are dying, we have come to see that the moment of death is often a moment of great quietude and peace. That often even those who have approached death with trepidation, in the moments before death, have an opening . . . It seems that the process of dying is like a melting, a dissolving . . ."[27] There have been a number of studies that support this more positive view of death and dying. Psychologists Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson, for example, conducted studies of "deathbed visions," where in the hours, days, or weeks before death the dying person witnessed and conversed with dead relatives, saw visions of other worlds, and experienced feelings of peace and serenity. They wrote about one sixty-five-year-old man with cancer of the stomach who "would look up to the wall and his eyes and face would brighten up as if he saw a person. He'd speak of the light, brightness, saw people who seemed real to him. He would say, 'Hello,' and 'There's my mother.' After it was over he closed his eyes and seemed very peaceful . . . Before the hallucinations he was very ill and nauseous; afterwards he was serene and peaceful."[28] In another account, an American woman dying of heart disease in her seventies "hallucinated about people who had recently expired. As time progressed she hallucinated about people who had been dead a long

time. She regressed in age with each hallucination until finally she was in her baby stage . . . and expired curled up in a uterine position."[29]

Further indications that dying may have its resplendent side are drawn from accounts of people who have come close to death from accidents or illness but then have been brought back to life through chance or medical intervention. These "near-death experiences" (NDEs) vary from person to person, but often include one or more of the following features: seeing other worlds, meeting guardian angels, experiencing tremendous peace, meeting friends or relatives who have died, going through a tunnel and encountering light, and having one's whole life pass by in a life review. One of the earliest published reports of an NDE is from Albert Heim, a Swiss geology professor who wrote at the end of the nineteenth century about his own close shave with death when he fell off a glacial sheet while climbing in the Swiss Alps. He dropped about sixty-five feet before landing on a border of snow. Heim writes: "I saw my whole past life take place in many images, as though on a stage at some distance from me . . . Everything was transfigured as though by a heavenly light and everything was beautiful without grief, without anxiety, and without pain . . . conflict had been transmuted into love. Elevated and harmonious thoughts dominated and united the individual images, and like magnificent music a divine calm swept through my soul . . . Then I heard a dull thud and my fall was over."[30] A more recent study in the British medical journal *Lancet* examined 344 cardiac patients in the Netherlands who had been resuscitated by CPR from clinical death, and reported that 18 percent of the subjects had near-death experiences. Many of these individuals were profoundly affected by their experiences even years later, becoming more empathic and intuitive, less afraid of death, and showing a strong belief in an afterlife.[31]

While NDEs have been used to support a belief in an afterlife—a topic we will take up in our next chapter—many skeptics regard near-death experiences as the brain's normal response to trauma. An article in the scientific journal *Nature* suggested that out-of-body experiences occurring during a NDE might be due to the misfiring under great stress of a part of our brain called the angular gyrus, which analyzes sensory data to give us a perception of our own bodies.[32] Other researchers have suggested that near-death experiences occur as brain cells die from lack of oxygen, or when the brain releases pain-reducing chemicals called endorphins. Interestingly,

former magician and professional debunker of the supernatural James Randi (The Amazing Randi) has had two near-death experiences himself. He comments, “I’ve been through it twice and I recall quite distinctly seeing the tunnel and the light . . . It’s what happens when the nervous system begins to relax.”[33] Regardless of whether one is a skeptic or believer, there seems to be ample evidence that the act of dying itself, at least for some, may not be the fearful event it is set up to be in popular Western consciousness.[34]

WHAT HAPPENS TO DEAD BODIES

After you die, life still goes on for others and preparations must be made for disposing of your dead body. Once someone dies in the United States a physician must declare him dead using the criteria of death described earlier, and sign a death certificate, which is then filed with the appropriate governmental authorities. Beyond these civic formalities and a few other requirements, what happens to your body after you die has a lot to do with the kinds of directives that you gave your relatives, friends, or legal authorities before death. Did you elect to donate your organs to help others undergoing transplant surgery? Did you choose to be cremated, or embalmed, or buried quickly in a simple coffin? Did you decide to have a funeral? In some cases, your religious background may provide a context for these and other decisions. Most Western religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, provide for earth burials, since earth is regarded as the original source of mankind for people of these faiths. As Genesis 3:19 states: “Dust you are, to dust you shall return.” In Judaism and Islam, the body must be buried as quickly as possible in a simple, unadorned coffin after having been washed, blessed, and covered with a white shroud. Among Hindus, the body is cremated after having been given a bath, dressed in elegant clothes, perfumed, decorated with flowers and garlands, blessed with prayers and rituals, and placed on a funeral pyre. Some cultures, such as the Yanomamo of Venezuela, may cremate the body, but then add some of the ashes to their plantain soup in a practice known in America as “endocannibalism.”

In other cultures, a corpse must await an appropriate time for cremation or burial. The Torajans of Sulawesi (an island in Indonesia), for example, bundle the corpse in vast amounts of absorbent cloth to soak up the juices

of putrefaction and then keep it around the house until it is ready for the next stage of the funeral. In some cases, such as in certain Mediterranean cultures, the body is buried until it reaches the skeleton stage, and then is dug up and reburied in another location in a more formal ceremony.[35] Zoroastrians do not bury or cremate the human body, since they regard the corpse as a source of pollution and do not wish to pollute either the earth or fire. Consequently, they leave the body in a Tower of Silence and let the vultures eat the remains. In Tibet, a person known as a "body breaker" dismembers the corpse before it is exposed to birds of prey and wild animals. Traditionally and still today, Buddhist monks meditate on these decomposing bodies, or images of them, as they reflect on the impermanence of all living things.[36]

A corpse left out in nature to rot will go through a number of changes as it decomposes. Within a minute after expiration, the face takes on the gray-white pallor of death. The body's musculature relaxes but soon begins to stiffen beginning with the eyelids, neck, and jaw, and then spreading to other muscles and internal organs within a few hours. This process, known as *rigor mortis* (literally, "stiffness of death"), results from the cessation of the production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which provides muscle cells with the energy needed to make a muscle relax after it has contracted. The body's temperature at death begins to fall two degrees Fahrenheit per hour until it reaches the surrounding temperature in a process called *algor mortis* ("coolness of death"). Also shortly after death, the skin begins to show purple-red blotches as red blood cells break down in what is referred to as *livor mortis* ("discoloration of death"). Within several hours after death, the skin loses its elasticity, obtaining the consistency of butcher's meat. Contrary to popular opinion, the teeth and hair do not continue growing after death. By seven days after death, most of the body is discolored and giant blood-tinged blisters begin to appear. Skin loosens and any pressure can cause the top layer to come off in large sheets in a process known as "skin slip."

In warm to hot weather, a body completely exposed to the elements takes only two to four weeks to be reduced to a skeleton. Insects and small animals do most of the damage. If buried one to two feet deep, a body will turn into a skeleton within a few months. An unembalmed adult body buried six feet deep in ordinary soil within a wooden coffin normally takes about ten to twelve years to decompose down to bony skeleton.[37]

Ultimately, given a long enough time interval, and exposure to the appropriate elements in nature, even the skeleton itself decomposes, leaving only dust behind. Jane Hollister Wheelwright, an eighty-year-old Jungian psychotherapist, shared her own thoughts about returning to nature as she contemplated her own death: ". . . my fantasy . . . is to melt into nature when I die; to become part of the trees, part of all vegetation; part of earth and rocks, also animals, even the reptiles and insects or anything else that moves—in short become part of the goddess nature . . ."[38] To die in this way, at least in terms of *body up* development, is literally to be reintegrated back into the primal stuff of nature. In the next chapter, we will explore death and dying from the perspective of *spirit down* development, and look at how this final stage of life may represent only the beginning of a whole new stage of existence.

THE GIFT OF DEATH: LIFE

The gift of death is life. At first glance, this may seem quite absurd: life and death are diametrically opposing forces; death represents the absence of life. And yet, upon reflection, we can begin to see the intimate relationship that they have to one another. From a naturalist's point of view, death makes it possible for new biological life to come into being. From a Christian point of view, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Sufi mystics counsel that we must die to self to live in God. Thus death means life. Even many agnostics or atheists regard the human encounter with death as a stimulus to live one's life more fully. If there were no death, it would be easy to slip into an ongoing state of semi-conscious stupor. The fact of death rouses in us an impulse to discover what it really means to live. We have all heard stories of people who have faced death and survived, saying afterward: "I never felt so alive!" By making us aware of our potential nonexistence, death forces us to come to grips with *who we really are* beneath the surface of things. It cracks open our complacency and shocks us into facing the facts of our Being in all its rawness and immediacy.

To live consciously with the knowledge of death may be the supreme gift of the human life cycle. This doesn't mean that we should become morbidly obsessed with death like people did in the Middle Ages. Quite the opposite. Our understanding of death ought to serve as a trigger for the celebration of life. For some, this might mean simply having a greater appreciation for the brief time that we have here on earth. For others, it might mean dying to the petty squabbles and selfish pursuits that spoil our days so that we can live a more expansive life. For still others, it could mean facing physical death with the expectation of a more glorious existence in the afterlife. Regardless of what our personal understanding of death may be, we can strive to discover in it something that renovates and heals. By seeing death as a gift instead of something to be avoided, we can go beyond the superficial details of our existence and experience the mystery of life in all of its creative splendor.

WAYS TO EXPLORE AND SUPPORT DEATH AND DYING

FOR YOURSELF

- Write an obituary for yourself as you would like to be remembered.
- Plan your own funeral, including setting, rituals, people, music, readings, events, food, and other appropriate details.
- Make out a legal will with the help of legal counsel or appropriate software. Also, create a living will that will stipulate how you wish to spend your last days, who you would like to make medical decisions if you are unable to do so, what kind of funeral you would like, how you would like your remains to be disposed of, and other relevant matters.

FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- Visit a friend or family member who is dying, and offer your presence in any way that would be helpful.
- Stay in touch with a friend or family member who has recently experienced the death of a close one, providing support, comfort, and possible referral to appropriate mental health services if necessary.
- Donate money to charity in the name of a loved one who has passed away.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Volunteer to train at a hospice in your community to provide respite care for caregivers, personal assistance for hospice patients, bereavement counseling for loved ones, or other appropriate services.
- Contribute financially to programs that make information about death and dying more readily available to the public (e.g., Americans for Better Care of the Dying, Hospice Foundation of America, your local hospice, etc.).
- Get involved with—or help put together—a forum, panel, or discussion group in your religious organization, workplace, or community center that focuses on raising awareness about issues related to death and dying.

CHAPTER 13

Beyond Death

TRAVEL TO OTHER LANDS

Either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another.

—SOCRATES[1]

Among the Lakota Indians there exists a belief that each individual possesses not one, but four souls. Each soul is associated with a different stage of life: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. When a person dies, parts of these four souls interpenetrate unborn fetuses and infuse them with life. At the same time, one of these souls travels southward along the *wanagi tacanker*, or "spirit path" of the Milky Way, and meets up with an old woman who proceeds to judge the soul according to its deeds during life. Depending upon the outcome, the soul is directed either to the spirit world, where it rejoins its deceased kin and enjoys a never-ending supply of buffalo meat, or is sent back to earth to exist in a marginal state as a ghost haunting the living.[2]

This vision of the afterlife, though not well known, has elements that connect with each of the world's major religions. It contains reincarnation, a feature of many Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. It includes a heavenly paradise of abundance comparable to those found in Islam and Christianity. It also speaks of a marginal or "ghostly" state of existence similar to those of ancient Judaism or the classical worlds of Greece and Rome. In addition, like so many of the world's religions (including that of ancient Egypt), there is a "last judgment" to determine the soul's fate in the world to come. It is quite amazing to consider that an indigenous American culture, which developed quite apart from mainstream

Western and Eastern cultures, developed a conception of the afterlife that mirrors and even synthesizes in many striking respects ideas from each of the world's main religions.

What should we make of this attempt to describe the world beyond death? Wishful thinking? Great storytelling? Or should we instead regard this effort as a sincere project to describe an authentic afterlife that exists beyond words and reason? In modern times, it has become standard practice for rational people to regard the prospect of life after death as an absurdity. In the past several decades, modern science has generated a great deal of research to support its claim that the human brain "creates" consciousness. If this is true, then it follows rationally that awareness of oneself and the world ceases to exist with the death of the brain. Our lives, in this view, are movies that have a final shot on the screen with the words *The End, Fin,* or *Thee-ah . . . thee-ah . . . thee-ah . . . that's all, folks!* emblazoned across it before fading into black. The predominance of this perspective in modern Western thought helps to explain why textbooks on human development never include a stage on the afterlife. From the standpoint of modern science, such a stage simply doesn't exist.

THE AFTERLIFE: AN IGNORED STAGE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT?

A review of crosscultural traditions, however, suggests that it is equally absurd to omit an afterlife from any comprehensive map of human development. For when one looks back at the history of civilization, virtually every culture has included an afterlife in its panoramic vision of existence. For thousands of years, cultures have had intimate contact with every aspect of death and out of these profound experiences have developed sophisticated models of postdeath existence. In contrast, modern society has had very little of this visceral connection to death, since much of it is hidden away in hospital intensive care units and mortuaries. Yet, experts in contemporary culture seem very confident of their assertions that there is nothing after death but oblivion. This contrasts starkly with traditional cultures such as those in China and Japan, which regard continued existence beyond death as an integral part of their existing social order, and where ancestorhood is ritualized along with other stages of life, including birth, marriage, and death. In some religions, including Islam, Buddhism, and

certain versions of Christianity, the afterlife is considered far more important than life on earth. Several cultures have even developed elaborate "guide books" of postdeath existence. Ancient Egyptian priests, for example, created texts now known as the *Egyptian Book of the Dead,* which contain spells, incantations, rites, and prayers to assist the dead person in living successfully in the next world. Tibetan Buddhists wrote *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* a manual read to a dead person over a period of forty-nine days, teaching them the ropes, so to speak, of traveling through the afterlife so as to attain freedom from rebirth. Medieval Catholic priests created the *Ars Moriendi* (The Art of Dying), a collection of texts showing the dying person how best to achieve salvation through Christ.

Many cultures around the world believe that the dead have power over the living. These cultures have developed elaborate rituals and strategies to make sure that deceased souls will favor the living rather than harm them or otherwise interfere in their lives. When my wife and I visited Bali several years ago, we attended a cremation ceremony that began with a procession to the cremation grounds. Scores of men carried an elaborately decorated funeral float with the body of the deceased person inside. Before they left the point of origin in downtown Ubud, I noticed that they rotated the float 360 degrees a number of times before they began their journey. Later on I discovered that this was done to "confuse" the dead soul and prevent it from finding its way back to its earthly home where it might bother the living. In contemporary China, family members of the deceased purchase miniature paper houses, cars, food items, television sets, and other worldly goods at specialty shops, and then ritually burn them to help placate their ancestors so that they might live comfortably in the afterworld. Even in our modern rationalistic American culture, belief in the afterlife runs high. Recent polls suggest that nearly three-quarters of the U.S. population believe that there is a heaven or hell, or at least *something* waiting for them on the other side of death.[3] The afterlife, for whatever modern science may think about it, is a universal feature of the human condition and needs to be represented in any full account of the journey of life.

TYPES OF IMMORTALITY

One thing is absolutely certain: There will be an afterlife. The big question is whether or not we'll be a part of it. On one level we can be confident

about our continued existence after death. No matter what happens to our physical bodies—whether they are cremated, buried, mummified, or shot into outer space—the atoms that make up our physical form will continue to exist, at least until they are converted to some other form such as energy. Something of us will always be there in the universe, even if, as some scientists predict, the universe eventually expands to the point where it reaches a condition of eternal stasis and nothing much ever happens again.[4] The nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche suggested that if time is infinite and the number of atoms in the universe is finite, it will only be a matter of time before the exact combination of atoms now in place at this moment all over the universe—including those that sustain your and my consciousness—will recur, and then recur again and again an infinite number of times. He used this amazing intimation of immortality to suggest that each person must live each moment of life to its fullest, since everyone will have to live that moment over and over again for eternity.[5]

There are other ways to view existence after physical death without necessarily believing in a traditional religious afterlife. Biologist Lewis Thomas, for example, wrote, "There are some creatures that do not seem to die at all; they simply vanish totally into their own progeny. Single cells do this. The cell becomes two, then four, and so on, and after awhile the last trace is gone. It cannot be seen as death; barring mutation, the descendants are simply the first cell, living all over again."[6] At a far more complex level, something like this also occurs in humans as parents seek immortality by continuing to exist after death in their own children. Sociobiologists tell us that whenever we support our children, grandchildren, and even—if we are childless—our nephews, nieces, and cousins, we are shepherding our genes beyond our own physical demise into countless future generations.[7] Some have even suggested that it is we ourselves who are undergoing this continual transformation from the simplest elements to larger and larger units of life. Jalalu'l-Din Rumi, the Persian Sufi poet and mystic, for example, wrote: "I died as inanimate matter and arose a plant / I died as a plant and rose again an animal / I died as an animal and arose a man / Why then should I fear to become less by dying?"[8]

On the other hand, we may seek immortality through our own creative achievements. Shakespeare wrote in one of his sonnets: ". . . do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong / My love shall in my verse ever live young."[9]

By creating literary, artistic, social, or scientific works, we pass on to new generations ideas that will have a life of their own and stir the lives of others to renewed vitality.

For the most part, however, people throughout the world have viewed the afterlife as a spiritual journey, whether illusory or real, to a place or to a series of places where the deceased is judged or tested. Based upon the final judgment, the traveler is then rewarded or punished for the life he has lived on earth, or alternatively, he is held back or promoted as a result of the lessons he has learned or failed to learn from his earthly experiences. While this pattern serves as a matrix for most world religions and world cultures, there is an incredible diversity in the ways that the details of an afterlife have been worked out. The Pangwe of southern Cameroon, for example, believe that after death a person lives on for a long time in heaven, but then he eventually dies and his "corpse" is thrown out with no chance of any further existence.[10] Norse legends speak of Vikings fallen in battle who journey on to Vallhalla, a place where they can continue to fight, drink, and sport as they did on earth. Taoist philosophers in China believe that when the breath or "life force" [ch'i] leaves the body at death it is redispersed as energy freely flowing between heaven and earth, like drops of a liquid poured back into water.[11] Most cultures view the afterlife as a solitary journey. However, certain Islamic traditions have it that on the day of resurrection entire communities will assemble, each at its own pond, and await judgment as a group.[12] Some views of the afterlife hold that if we are lucky we will disappear entirely at death into nirvana or the void, while others say that after death the actual physical body of the deceased will be resurrected and look and function exactly as it did during earthly life.

THE MOMENT OF DEATH

Strictly speaking, if there is total extinction of consciousness at the moment of death, then there is absolutely no way of verifying this, since there will be no one "there" to report back that "there is nothing there." The French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal used this kind of logic to proffer a wager to doubters that a person was always better off betting on life after death than on extinction. He reasoned that if you bet on God and you won (e.g., God exists), then you gained everything. If you bet on God and you lost (e.g., God doesn't exist), then you lost nothing. On the other

hand, if you didn't bet on God and God doesn't exist, you lost nothing, but if you didn't bet on God and He *does* exist, then you lost everything (e.g., God's presence in the afterlife). Thus, you were better off from a strictly mathematical point of view living with the expectation of being with God after death.[13] With this in mind, we can begin to explore in some depth the experiences that may subjectively happen to us in the moments just before, during, and after physical death.[14]

If there *is* some form of consciousness that survives physical death, then what happens at the moment of death if not extinction? Many answers have been given to this question. My own personal favorite comes from a spiritual advisor who once told me: "You take the last breath and God takes the very next breath." Traditions that believe in reincarnation frequently hold that *the last thought* one has at the moment of death will determine one's afterlife and ultimately one's next birth. According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the moment of death is the single best opportunity in all of existence to achieve liberation from the wheel of rebirth. At that moment, one encounters the Dharma-Kaya or The Primary Clear Light of Absolute Being. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* counsels the person who has just died: "O nobly-born (so-and-so), listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognize it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality . . ."[15] If the deceased can recognize this Light as its own true nature, then he merges with it and attains liberation. On the other hand, if this encounter with Absolute Reality proves too overwhelming, the deceased may shrink back from it in terror, only to be given a second chance to recognize the Light as oneself. Failing this second encounter, the soul is driven by the "winds of karma" into contact with its own past deeds, which appear in the form of peaceful and wrathful deities, and eventually it takes birth in a new physical body.

Other accounts of the moment of death suggest that some people, especially those who expected nothingness, may not even recognize that they've died. Former psychologist and spiritual teacher Ram Dass explains that if an individual has been deeply identified with the physical body during life they may experience a type of confused "sleep" at death, while those who harbor strong connections to specific people, places, or things

might continue to hover around these attachments without realizing that death has taken place.[16] American author E. J. Gold has written a book called *The American Book of the Dead*, which seeks to translate the exotic symbolism of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* into terms more easily understood by members of contemporary American culture. He suggests that the moment of death may feel like "a deep, incessant sensation of . . . being inexorably drawn downward into a pool of mercury or lead, of melting into the earth . . . [or] a sensation of clammy coldness as though one has been immersed in ice water . . . [or] a sensation of being just on the verge of explosion . . . [or] a feeling of being utterly at peace, utterly alone, completely outside space and time, free of all necessity."[17] Some of these descriptions match those given in ancient accounts. For example, the Pre-Columbian Maya believed that the moment of death felt something like the downward plunge of a canoe. The ancient Vedic philosophers in India wrote, "When a person departs from this world, he goes to the air. It opens out there for him like the hole of a chariot wheel. Through that he goes upwards."[18] Other ancient myths have described the beginning of the journey after death in terms of descending into the bowels of the earth, crawling through a tunnel, entering a whirlpool, crossing a bridge, going through a door, being swallowed by a gigantic monster, or flying away into space.[19]

JOURNEY OF THE DEAD

If there is a conscious afterlife, then it's likely that you'll have a guide to help you navigate your way from this world to the land of the dead. In Norse mythology, the Valkyries or female warrior spirits who were servants of the Nordic god Odin appeared to warriors killed in battle and led them to a new life in Vallhalla. In Greek mythology, the god Hermes delivered the souls of the dead to Charon who ferried them across the rivers of the underworld to the gates of Hades. Among the Goldi people of Siberia, psychologist and afterlife researcher Sukie Miller writes, ". . . a shaman . . . takes a soul across to the other side. He traps the soul of a deceased person in a sacred pillow and then mounts a notched tree to see into the distance to preview his journey. Two spirits come to assist him, and the shaman, the assistants, and the soul set off on a special dogsled supplied with nourishing food. As soon as the travelers reach the afterworld . . . he leaves the soul

with relatives and returns to the living, carrying gifts and greetings."[20] Spirit guides are reputed to have expert knowledge of the geography of the afterlife, and can help the soul avoid pitfalls, delays, or other interruptions in the journey, almost in the same way that a maitre d' can get you a good table at a fine restaurant without a long wait.

The guide who appears at death to take you into the afterlife may turn out to be the same guardian spirit who was present at your birth. Ancient Egyptians believed that after death, the *ba*, or personal soul of the deceased, became fully realized by joining up with its counterpart, the *ka*, which acted as a kind of guardian angel during life. The Maori goddess Hinetitama (Goddess of the Dawn), which protects pregnant mothers and newborns, is the same deity who becomes Hine-nui-te-po, Goddess of the Darkness, at the end of life, and helps souls across the threshold of death.[21] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross writes about guardian angels in childhood that sometimes reappear as one nears death in old age: "What the church tells little children about guardian angels is based on fact . . . Everyone has such a spirit guide, whether you believe it or not . . . A dying old lady conveys to me, 'Here he is again.' Since I do not know what she is referring to, I ask this lady if she could share with me what she has just seen. She tells me, 'You must know, when I was a little kid he used to always be around me. But I have totally forgotten that he existed.' A day later she dies, full of joy, knowing that someone who loves her dearly is waiting for her."[22] Here we see a case where the angel of destiny described in the chapter on prebirth, at the beginning of this book, comes back to the soul at the end of its life, to remind it of its divine nature and help it into the next stage of existence.

After being led to the afterworld by a guide, many accounts from cultures around the world suggest that you will face some type of judgment where your deeds on earth are reviewed and evaluated according to an eternal moral or spiritual standard. In Christianity, Jesus tells the parable of the last judgment when the Son of Man is to come and sit on his throne and all nations will gather before him while he separates them into two groups "as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). Those who have loved their neighbors will receive eternal life while those who did not will go to the eternal fire. In the Islamic afterlife, the two angels Munker and Nakir interrogate the dead, and depending upon the outcome, they are either ushered into paradise or cast into hell. Every soul must walk

across the bridge of Sirat, a bridge that is “finer than a hair and sharper than a sword.” Those who are righteous believers manage to keep their balance, while nonbelievers slip and plummet into the hellish abyss. In ancient Egyptian culture, the judgment scene occurs in the Hall of the Two Truths (the Hall of Maat). There, the heart of the deceased is placed on one pan of a scale, while on the other is put the feather of the Goddess Maat, symbolizing truth and justice. An ibis-headed God named Thoth impartially records the results, following which the righteous are welcomed into heaven by the resurrected god Osiris while the unjust are devoured by a monster called Amemet who resembles a combined version of a crocodile, a lion, and a hippopotamus.[23]

Once you have been judged or tested, then it’s likely that you will enter into a postdeath existence that has its own unique ecology. Although usually existing beyond space and time, cultures have generally employed metaphors based upon the geography of the earth and its natural features to describe these otherworldly states. As such, afterworlds can be situated below the earth, on the earth, or above the earth. Those that are found under the earth—the “underworlds”—are usually dark, sometimes fiery, sometimes icy, and full of geological features like volcanic craters, chasms, jagged cliffs, pits, deep valleys, labyrinths, or swamps. Some of these are actual “hells” or places of punishment, as noted earlier, while others are simply “netherworlds” where the dead live an eternally shadowy existence as bodiless phantoms. These include Hades in ancient Greece, where Odysseus spoke with the phantom shapes of his fellow warriors, and Sheol in ancient Judaism, which Job described as “a land of deep darkness . . . of gathering shadows, of deepening shadow, lit by no way of light, dark upon dark” (Job 10:21–22).

A number of indigenous cultures situate the afterlife directly on the surface of the earth. In many cases this place is represented as a mystical island. Australian aborigines called it Braklu, the Celts referred to it as Tirnanog, while many South Sea islanders speak of a mythic island of the dead they called Java (not the Indonesian island of the same name). Greek settlers in southern Italy considered certain wild and eerie regions in their vicinity as parts of the underworld existing on the surface of the earth. The Dusun of Borneo believe the abode of the dead exists on a high mountain. The Admiralty Islanders on Manus near New Guinea believed that the dead persist in the exact same spot as the living as a kind of double image, with

the same profession, house, and other belongings: “The living and the dead coexist in space, having only different modes of being.”[24]

Finally, there are those afterworlds located above the earth: in the sky, among the clouds, in the sun or other celestial bodies, or even beyond these orbs in higher spiritual realms. We’ve already noted how the Lakota Indians located at least part of their journey of the afterlife in the Milky Way. Alaska Native cultures often link the world of the dead closely with the aurora borealis (northern lights). The ancient Egyptians believed that the dead traveled in a barge to join the sun god. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the concept of paradise (a word derived from the Persian *pairidaeza*, meaning “walled garden”) begins in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible, when the prophet Daniel writes: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt . . . Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:1–3).

The New Testament speaks most explicitly about heaven in Revelation, authored by the apostle John. It is here where popular Christian culture received its images of a heaven filled with pearly gates, jeweled walls, and streets paved with gold. In Islam, paradise is described as a place where there are two kinds of every fruit, upholstered couches, palm trees and pomegranates, green pastures, and virgins with white skin and dark eyes.[25] Some Buddhist sects believe in a celestial “pure land” in the western part of the universe where the deceased blissfully contemplate the Amita Buddha or the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kuan-Yin. In some cases, especially in Western religions, the journey of life concludes with eternal residence in one of these heavenly or hellish worlds. In other belief systems, such as in Hinduism and Buddhism, the soul’s presence in the afterlife is but a temporary way station on the journey, as it travels from lifetime to lifetime in search of liberation from continual rebirth.

THE DENIAL OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

If you are a rationalist, you may be thinking at this point that what’s been described above is pure conjecture at best and mad delusion at worst. Your point of view is not strictly a modern one. A contemporary of the Buddha named Ajita Kesakambalin (who lived around 400–500 BCE), taught that

human beings do not survive physical death: “When he dies . . . his senses vanish into space . . . those who maintain the existence [of immaterial categories] speak vain and lying nonsense. When the body dies both fool and wise alike are cut off and perish. They do not survive after death.”[26] Similarly in the Western cultural tradition, the denial of life after death extends back at least as far as the Hellenistic philosopher Epicurus (341–271 BCE) and his Roman disciple Lucretius (95–55 BCE), who believed that since death is final, humanity need not fear everlasting torture and punishment. It seems, however, that the denial of life after death became a widely held perspective in Western civilization only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the flowering of the scientific method and modern rational discourse.

As noted earlier, the most commonly reasoned argument against life after death is that since the human brain causes consciousness, it follows that when the brain dies, consciousness vanishes along with it. When I questioned a leading brain surgeon about the possibility of consciousness continuing without the brain, he replied: “I have a pocket knife in my jacket in case you’d like to test this hypothesis.” I politely declined his invitation and instead took the point I think he was trying to make: that when the brain is radically altered by surgery, crime, or accident, the effects on human consciousness are usually immediate, dramatic, and castastrophic. This intimate link between what is done to the brain and what directly ensues as a change or cessation of consciousness—something as basic as a knock on the head—is perhaps the best causal argument for the impossibility of life after death. Some rationalists suggest that a belief in life after death emerged as a way for humans, suddenly aware of mortality in a way that other animals were not, to avoid crippling anxiety. Others point out that systems of the afterlife are merely reflections of the social and moral prejudices of the specific cultures that developed them. After all, women and people from lower social classes have often been excluded from paradise in religions around the world.

Those who attempt to demonstrate the idea of life after death against the claims of scientific skepticism usually employ the tools and rules of conventional science to try to beat it at its own game. Thomas Edison wrote an article in a 1920 issue of *Scientific American* describing his own efforts to develop a machine that would be able to detect souls who had died. He reasoned, “If our personality survives, then it is strictly logical or scientific

to assume that it retains memory, intellect, other faculties and knowledge that we acquire on this Earth. Therefore, if personality exists after what we call death, it is reasonable to conclude that those who leave the Earth would like to communicate with those they have left here. I am inclined to believe that our personality hereafter will be able to affect matter. If this reasoning be correct, then, if we can evolve an instrument so delicate as to be affected by our personality as it survives in the next life, such an instrument, when made available, ought to record something."[27] Although it was claimed that Edison worked on a prototype until his death in 1931, models or plans for the invention have never been found.

The escape artist Harry Houdini, a longtime skeptic who nevertheless was always curious about the possibility of life after death, devised a coded message with his wife, Bess, which he planned to relay back to her through a spiritualistic séance after he died as proof of his continued existence. After his death, his wife conducted ten séances over a period of ten years attempting to recover the message but gave up after there was no word from Harry.[28] One current project going on at the University of Arizona is attempting to do very much the same kind of thing by having psychic mediums transmit information from deceased discarnate entities to living people using strict scientific research methods and protocols.[29] Contemporary researchers of near-death experiences (NDEs) also use rational standards and scientific measures in arguing for an afterlife. Cases are pointed to, for example, of individuals blind from birth who are able to see visions during NDEs, or of people declared dead on the operating table who recover and report seeing instrument measurements and other features of the room not perceivable from the position of someone lying in a supine position.[30]

SCIENCE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND SURVIVAL

One difficulty with using scientific research methods and rational standards to defend a belief in life after death, however, is that there are always rational arguments and scientific research methods that can be used to refute these claims.[31] It is more useful, in my estimation, to critique the shortcomings of conventional science *itself* at its origins to explain why the scientific method may be inadequate to the task of either affirming or denying the existence of life after death. To be blunt about it, for all of its

great accomplishments in describing the objective world, science has never been able to explain what consciousness really *is*. Science can describe how a lesion in the primary visual area of the brain can create a distortion in the visual world, but it can't account for what that unique visual distortion actually is *in itself*—let us say, a fuzzy sunflower with specks of light surrounding it.[32]

Science inevitably dismisses what it cannot explain as "subjective" and distrusts it for its lack of empirical validity. However, this so-called subjectivity, or consciousness, is really the basis for any type of inquiry, scientific or otherwise. When René Descartes, the French philosopher and pioneer of modern rationalism, wrote, "I think, therefore I am," he was attempting to create a stable footing for all rational inquiry to follow. However, he neglected to inquire, "Who is this 'I' that thinks in the first place?" In other words, he assumed this first "I" as a given, without proving it rationally. The problem that Descartes had in defining the nature of this "inquiring I" at the beginning of the history of modern science continues to bedevil the scientific enterprise.[33] Conventional science can explain to us what we see when we look outward into the world, but it too often forgets that there is always someone present doing the looking with a unique state of consciousness.[34] And who is that someone? Who is this "I" that Descartes unthinkingly posited at the start of the scientific era?

This may be the critical part of the puzzle that will enable us to move beyond mere scientific "proofs" or "refutations of whether there is life after death." Perhaps the question we should be asking is one that death and dying expert Stephen Levine suggests we all ask ourselves about this great mystery: "Who dies?"[35] In other words, when we die, *who* is it that actually dies? We observe from the objective exterior that the physical body of another person dies. But what dies *inwardly*? You might think: "I do." But who is this "I" that dies? The Scottish philosopher David Hume speculated that this "I" may not even really exist. Instead, he suggested that human beings experience individual moments of consciousness, one right after the other, and that these separate events somehow get spliced together and called an "I."[36] In this respect, he was in agreement with the Buddha, who said very much the same thing. According to Buddhism, the "I" is like an onion. Peel off the various layers, the emotions, sensations, perceptions, intuitions, and the rest, and at the very center you find nothing. Absolutely nothing. Ironically, there is corroboration of this conclusion from modern

brain research.[37] Psychobiologist Michael Gazzaniga, for example, suggests that the brain consists of multiple "selves," each designed to spring into action whenever a particular occasion demands it. One dramatic example of these multiple selves at work exists in the lives of those with severe "multiple personality disorder" (now called "dissociative disorder"), where as many as ten or twenty selves can erupt periodically over the course of a person's lifetime.[38]

More recent brain research suggests that there is an area in the posterior superior parietal lobe of the neocortex called the orientation association area (OAA), which among other things helps distinguish between the individual person and everything else, or in other words, marks out the you from the infinite not-you that makes up the rest of the universe. Scientists have intravenously injected radioactive tracers into the brains of Tibetan monks to track what goes on in the OAA as the meditators slip into altered states of consciousness. It turns out that this area of the brain, which sharpens the distinction between the "I" and the "not-I," actually slows down as the monks deepen their meditation.[39] In other words, the sense of "I-ness" or separateness from the world begins to disappear. This leads me to the following thought experiment: If the sense of "I" disappears during meditation, and let's say for the sake of argument, that the physical brain dies while the subject still happens to be in this state of I-lessness, then from a subjective point of view, what is it that actually changes? The sense of "I" was erased before the physical brain died in our experiment. What is it, then, in terms of consciousness, that actually dies here?

This brings us back to the difficulty that conventional science has always had in pinning down exactly what consciousness *is*. Since it really hasn't provided a satisfactory description, let alone a good explanation, for the nature of consciousness, science stumbles at this point. When the Buddha was asked where he would go when he died he is reported to have said, "Where does the fire go when the fuel is used up?"

The metaphor he used of consciousness as fire or light is a powerful one. When we turn off the lights in the bedroom, there is still light elsewhere in an otherwise fully lit house. Is that existing light the same as or different from the light we turned off? Where does the light from one bulb begin and another leave off? Dutch researcher Pim van Lommel, whose work on near-death experiences was cited in the last chapter, puts the metaphor into a telecommunications context: "Compare [consciousness]

with a TV program. If you open the TV set, you will not find the program. The TV set is a receiver. When you turn off your TV set, the program is still there but you can't see it. When you put off your brain, your consciousness is there but you can't feel it in your body."[40]

DYING: A QUESTION OF TIME

Because conventional science is unable to enter into the actual inner conscious states of its subjects, it is unable to say for sure what happens to that consciousness when the brain is "turned off" (e.g., dies). Moreover, its attempts to rationally interpret near-death experiences as merely the final pyrotechnics of dying neurons says nothing about the inner state of the dying person as this is going on. This issue becomes particularly important when we consider the nature of time. Science has become very adept at recording intervals of time with astonishing accuracy, down to 3.3 × 10-44. Yet, as the French philosopher Henri Bergson observed, science is unable to measure *inner* time or what he called *real* time, as opposed to mathematical time.[41] Inner time, or the felt sense of duration, can differ dramatically from mathematical or "scientific" time. People often speak of important moments in their lives that seemed to last for hours, yet which turned out to be only a few seconds of "clock time." Some of these accounts include near-death experiences. People have reported at such times that "my whole life flashed in front of me." At other times, it's just been a feeling of time slowing down. When two cars collided in front of her as she drove on the freeway in Southern California, for example, psychologist Jean Houston reported that she was suddenly yanked into another time zone: "The two cars [crashing ahead of me] moved with ponderous slowness but with great grace up into the air. I marveled for the longest time at their balletic grace—they hovered up there like two elephantine Nijinskys executing a pas de deux in the Los Angeles air."[42]

Accounts of time slowing down near a moment of potential death remind me of a short story from one of my favorite authors, the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, who was himself fascinated with the question of time. In "The Secret Miracle," a man is about to be executed by a firing squad during World War II, but just as the triggers are pulled he makes a wish to God to have one more year of life to compose the novel he has always been yearning to write. In the story, he is granted his wish—the bullets are

retarded in their flight and he stands immobile in front of the soldiers, mentally constructing the book of his dreams. When he is done with his project after the designated year, the bullets come rushing toward him and finish him off.[43] If Bergsonian real time slows down as we approach death, then what is to prevent the possibility of an individual, within a few seconds of dying from an outside observer's point of view, going through hours, days, weeks, months, years, or even longer periods of subjective time before that final moment comes?[44]

We know that as we approach the limits of the objective universe at both ends, the very large and the very small, the conventional laws of traditional physics begin to break down. At the most cosmic levels, concepts like dark matter, black holes, and multiple dimensions distort the space and time of everyday life. At the tiniest levels, the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics interferes with the precise mathematical laws of both Newton and Einstein. Who's to say that equivalent things might not occur in the subjective universe of each individual person as he reaches the limiting factor of physical death? We know that the length of a synaptic cleft in the brain is astonishingly short—200 to 300 angstroms (an angstrom equals one hundred-millionth of a centimeter)—a length approaching an atomic scale of dimensions when quantum indeterminacy starts to become important. Why then couldn't the decaying neurons of the dying brain lead human consciousness into similar conditions of indeterminacy?[45]

At a cosmic level, death may function very much like a "black hole" into which a person might descend but not be able to "report back" its light or consciousness to an outside observer. Similarly, the inner experience of time to the dying person may stretch on along a trajectory approaching infinity. While we're objectively watching a person going through their last few seconds of life, he or she may be subjectively experiencing, in a radically slowed down time frame, entire lifetimes, paradises, judgments, hells, eternities, or any of the other possible experiences of the afterlife that we've surveyed in this chapter. At this point, reality ceases to be what outside observers agree upon—the small-case reality of science. Now it becomes the inward Reality of a consciousness that stretches out beyond the limitations of conventional time and space into unlimited possibilities that human cultures may have only caught a glimpse of in their richly diverse descriptions of the afterlife.

Conclusion

PLANTING YOUR OAR IN THE SAND

Every phase [of life] exists for the benefit of the whole and for the benefit of every other phase; if it is damaged, both the whole and every individual phase suffers.

—Father Romano Guardini[1]

Congratulations, you made it! To the end of this book, that is. Making your way through the journey of life is another matter. Odysseus made it through his own incredible adventure and back to Ithaca. But even after all he went through, he still had one more important task to accomplish. During his journey he visited the underworld of Hades and received important advice from the blind seer Teiresias. Teiresias told Odysseus that after he returned to Ithaca and settled his accounts with the suitors who were pestering his wife, Penelope, he needed to embark on one last journey. He was to take an oar and travel inland until he came to a country where no man had ever known the sea, or seen ships, or tasted salt in their food. Teiresias told him that he would know that he had come to such a place when a passerby would look at him carrying the oar and remark: "What is that winnowing fan you have on your shoulder?" The man, having never seen an oar, would think it was an agricultural implement. At that point Odysseus was instructed to plant his oar in the sand and make a *temenos*, or sacred place, at that spot to worship and sacrifice to Poseidon, who was the god that had caused him so much trouble in getting back to Ithaca. When this was successfully completed, Odysseus could return home and get some rest. Then, according to Teiresias, "death shall come to you from the sea,

and your life shall ebb away very gently when you are full of years and peace of mind, and your people shall bless you."[2]

This final task for Odysseus—planting an oar in the sand—has special significance for those of us who have completed our journey through this book. After all that he went through, his struggles, temptations, stagnations, and salvations, Odysseus finally had acquired some wisdom about the human condition. This knowledge was not to be wasted. Odysseus traveled deep inland to a place where the inhabitants had never seen the sea; where the native population had never experienced the tumult, the turbulence, the richness, or the grandeur of the journey of life. It was, after all, a *desert* that Odysseus had come to. He was instructed to plant an oar—that is, to pierce the parched ground with a rich symbol of his sea journey—and by doing this sacred act to fructify the earth and bring new wisdom into barren regions. In this same way, after your own journey through the twelve stages life, you owe the gods a final sacred act. You must plant your own oar of understanding and wisdom concerning the human journey into the arid and undeveloped lands that lay scattered around you.

There are at least three ways for you to do this. Using the practical activities at the end of each chapter, you can use your newly acquired wisdom about the stages of life to transform yourself, nurture your family and friends, and/or support your community. First, you can plunge the oar of wisdom into the deserts of your own life by seeking to heal past traumas, address present trials and tribulations, and plan for the uncertainties of the future. Second, you may wish to focus your efforts on helping family and friends through the challenges of their own individual life stages by nurturing the growth of your children, mentoring your adolescents and young adults, and honoring the wisdom of your aging relatives. Third, you may want to sink your oar of understanding into the deserts of your own community, by, for example, contributing money to prevent birth defects, volunteering at a school, or advocating for the needs of the elderly. The appendices that follow provide resources (films, books, and organizations) that will help get you started on this next stage of your journey.

As we've seen in the course of this book, each stage of life has its own unique gift. These gifts represent the inner resources of the human life cycle that sustain it and keep it moving. It is my wish that after navigating your way through the twelve stages of life, you will feel inspired to draw upon these gifts and transform yourself and the world around you. Do as

Odysseus did. Plant your oar in the sand. Make a difference in the world by doing what you can to improve the ecology of each stage of life. I was reminded, while watching the film *An Inconvenient Truth*, of how people started taking better care of the environment after seeing a photo of Earth taken from outer space in the early 1970s. I'd like to think that in my own imperfect way, I've provided a snapshot of the human life span, and that by seeing it in relief like this, you will begin to care for the stages of life in a new way. I hope that as a result of reading this book you'll be kinder to your elders, more understanding of your teenagers, more protective of your youngsters, more forgiving of yourself, and more sensitive to the developmental needs of all human beings as they travel through time on this miracle journey called life.

Appendix A

FILMS TO ILLUMINATE THE TIMES OF YOUR LIFE

A movie can change your life. One changed mine. Twenty years ago I quit years of being in psychotherapy, after despairing of ever finding a mate to fill the gap in my lonely thirty-five-year-old bachelor existence. "You can't change the past," I thought to myself. "Better to accept my lot and prepare to endure another forty or fifty years of empty beds and solo dinners." Then I saw the Robert Zemeckis film *Back to the Future.* In that movie, Michael J. Fox plays Marty McFly, a 1980s teenager who goes back to the 1950s in a souped-up DeLorean time machine to literally change his destiny by altering his past. I burst out of the movie theater, rushed to a phone booth, and called my therapist to reestablish contact. Shortly thereafter, I started to work with her again on the self-defeating patterns in my own life. Within three months, on the first day of spring, I met my wife-to-be. Of course it was my own work, or perhaps destiny, that made it all happen, but I'll never forget that it was a film that served as a catalyst for change.

The list of 137 movies that follows may include one or more films that can change your own life. I call these "stages of life movies" because each one of them attempts to come to grips with the essential predicament of life —that we are physical beings trapped in the inexorable flow of time, are aware of this fact, and find our lives shaped by the tension between these two forces. The films are organized by the twelve stages of life that make up the structure of this book: prebirth, birth, infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, late childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, midlife, mature adulthood, late adulthood, and death and dying (with an additional section on postdeath existence). I've included an introductory category of

movies that span many, if not most, of the stages of life. These include *Citizen Kane,* which seeks to find the underlying theme of a newspaper tycoon's life by following him from early childhood through early adulthood and midlife into late adulthood and death, and *Wild Strawberries,* which tracks an old professor as he goes on a journey to accept an award that brings him into contact with characters at several different stages of life—stages that mirror his own life history. (Erik Erikson used this film in his human development classes at Harvard to illustrate his "Eight Ages of Man" theory.) One could, of course, argue for the inclusion of many more movies on this list, for it seems that the most excellent films in the history of cinema have always had themes that revolve around life cycle issues: growth, stagnation, initiation, disintegration, death, rebirth, remembrance, and more.

Great films rivet us because they move us into the dramatic contours of our lives and the lives of those who are significant to us. They help us look back at who we were, mirror our present state of existence, and point beyond our current life toward a set of possibilities that we might yet achieve. Ultimately, movies—good movies—are about *becoming*; they move us to a new place in ourselves, and by moving us, they re-create the development that takes place (or fails to take place) in our own lives.

I hope you will find that the movies on this list provide you with opportunities to reflect on the stages of your life that you have already lived, the stage you are in now, and the stages that are yet to come. Watch them with friends or relations, and use the films as starting points to talk about your memories, reflections, dreams, and aspirations. These "stages of life movies" may be the closest that modern technology will ever come to the construction of an actual time machine. Enjoy your travels, and remember: These movies can change your life, if you're lucky enough, but in any event, they definitely will cause you to think about your life in a totally new way.

MULTISTAGE FILMS

56 Up Director Michael Apted began videotaping the lives of several British schoolchildren in 1964 when they were seven years old, and he has continued recording their lives every seven years since then. They are forty-nine years old in this latest documentary that includes spliced cuts from

previous versions. See also his previous versions, including *28 Up*, *35 Up*, and *42 Up*. (2012) 180 min.

Antonia's Line This Oscar winner for Best Foreign Film chronicles the lives of five generations of women from postwar times to the present and beautifully illustrates all twelve stages of life. In Dutch with English subtitles. (1995) 102 min.

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman Cicely Tyson's Emmy Award-winning portrayal of a 110-year-old former slave reminiscing about her life from the Civil War to the start of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. (1974) 110 min. TV movie.

Cinema Paradiso A famous film director in midlife reminisces about his childhood and adolescence and the village projectionist who had such a major influence on his life. In Italian with English subtitles. (1988) 123 min.

Citizen Kane Called by many critics the best film ever made, this Orson Welles gem depicts a newspaper magnate as he moves through the innocence of childhood, the idealism of early adulthood, the disappointments of midlife, and the decrepitude of old age. (1941) 119 min.

Goodbye, Mr. Chips Follows the life of a British schoolteacher from the mistakes of his early career in the classroom, through a warm but tragic marriage, to his maturity and final deathbed scene where he affirms the integrity of his life. (1939) 115 min.

It's a Wonderful Life This Christmas favorite is also one of the best stages of life films around. We experience George Bailey's childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, midlife, and even a sort of "postdeath" experience in a parallel universe via Clarence, "the angel who never grew up." (1946) 125 min.

The Last Emperor Follows the life of Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, as he becomes a buoy in the waves of history, finally ending up as a common gardener during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. (1987) 140 min.

Our Town Paul Newman stars in this staging of Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, which portrays people at different stages of the life cycle reflecting upon life's deeper meanings in a small New Hampshire town in the 1930s. (2003) 120 min. TV movie

Same Time, Next Year A couple meets to have an affair at a seaside resort for a week every summer over a period of twenty years. The story device provides an opportunity to examine how life span changes (and social-historical events) profoundly affect relationships. (1978) 119 min.

Scrooge A musical version of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, where Ebenezer Scrooge visits his past, present, and future on the way to a personal and spiritual transformation of his character. (1970) 86 min.

Seasons of Life A PBS five-part documentary series covering infancy and early childhood, childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood, produced by WQED/Pittsburgh and the University of Michigan. (1990) five 60 min. videos. Available for free viewing as video stream at http://www.learner.org/resources/series54.html.

Wild Strawberries An old professor travels to his alma mater to accept an honorary degree and on the way there revisits his life. The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson used this Ingmar Bergman film in his course on human development at Harvard to illustrate each of his eight stages of man. In Swedish with English subtitles. (1957) 90 min.

Yi Yi This story of an extended family's daily life in Taiwan manages to illustrate all twelve stages of life in an intimate yet panoramic view of the human condition. In Mandarin Chinese with English subtitles. (2000) 173 min.

PREBIRTH, BIRTH, AND INFANCY FILMS

Journey to be Born: An Introduction to Pre- and Perinatal Psychology (1986) 28 min. VHS (Available from STAR Foundation, PO Box 516, Geyserville, CA 95441). (Also available: *The Psychology of Birth).*

Life's Greatest Miracle PBS sequel to *The Miracle of Life,* with new footage and state-of-the-art animation techniques. (2001) 60 min. Watch online for free at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/miracle/program.html#.

Look Who's Talking Depicts life from an infant's point of view, using the voice of actor Bruce Willis. (1989) (PG-13) 90 min.

The Miracle of Life This award-winning PBS documentary shows the development of human life from conception to birth, using stunning photography. (1983) 60 min.

EARLY CHILDHOOD FILMS

The Children Are Watching Us Before Vittorio de Sica began making neorealist films, he made this little-known studio gem about the life of an unhappily married couple seen from the perspective of their young son. In Italian with English subtitles. (1944) 92 min.

The Curse of the Cat People Fascinating mood piece about a girl who has an imaginary playmate that figures into a supernatural murder mystery. Amazingly, at one point, a reference is made to a classic book in Jungian child psychology, Frances Wickes's *The Inner World of Childhood.* (1944) 70 min.

Forbidden Games A young girl and boy seek to ritualize the horrors of war by creating their own cemetery. In French with English subtitles. (1952) 90 min.

The Fallen Idol A little boy's sheltered world is threatened when he gets caught up in the secrets and lies of the adults around him. (1949) 92 min.

Ponette A four-year-old tries to come to grips with the loss of her mother in an automobile accident through play, fantasy, peer interactions, and perhaps even through a supernatural encounter. In French with English subtitles. (1995) 92 min.

The Red Balloon Academy Award-winning short that depicts a day in the life of a lonely boy who befriends a red balloon that takes him on an

adventure. (1956) 34 min.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD FILMS

Amarcord Director Federico Fellini's growing-up memoir. In Italian with English subtitles. (1974) 124 min.

Avalon The world through the eyes of a boy growing up in 1940s Baltimore. (1990) 126 min.

Big A boy wishes he could be an adult, and it happens—with all sorts of complications. (1988) 98 min.

A Christmas Story Absolutely delightful holiday film that reveals the inner world of a nine-year-old boy growing up in the 1940s in Middle America. (1983) 95 min.

Fanny and Alexander A brother and sister see the varied worlds of adults—magical, austere, festive, raucous—mirrored around them in turn-of-the-century Sweden. In Swedish with English subtitles. (1983) 197 min.

Pather Panchali (The Song of the Road) The first of Indian director Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy tells of Apu's childhood days. In Hindi with English subtitles. (1954) 112 min.

Small Change François Truffaut's postcard of childhood is an innocent yet poignant look at the inner worlds of children from two to puberty growing up in a small French village. In French with English subtitles. (1976) 104 min.

LATE CHILDHOOD FILMS

The 400 Blows François Truffaut's magnificent story about the making of a delinquent still stands out as one of the best films ever made about late childhood/early adolescence. In French with English subtitles. (1959) 97 min. *Au Revoir Les Enfants (Good-bye, Children)* Louis Malle's memoir of being an eleven-year-old forming a heartbreaking friendship with a Jewish boy who was eventually sent to Auschwitz. In French with English subtitles. (1987) 104 min.

Léolo A twelve-year-old boy growing up in a seedy part of Montreal tries to hold on to his dignity while undergoing “soul murder” at the hands of a super-dysfunctional family. (1992) 107 min.

Lord of the Flies Stranded on a desert island, a group of British schoolboys reveal a savage nature that could be their instincts coming out or a mirror of the cruel society in which they were raised. (1963) 91 min.

The Member of the Wedding A twelve-year-old girl living in a small Georgia town experiences the intensity and confusion of living in between childhood and adolescence on the eve of her brother’s wedding. (1952) 90 min.

My Life as a Dog A wonderful, funny, and sad look at the world inside the mind of a twelve-year-old boy growing up in rural Sweden in the 1950s. In Swedish with English subtitles. (1985) 101 min.

Stand by Me Four boys go in search of a dead body. (1986) 87 min.

Sundays and Cybele A thirty-year-old man whose nerves have been shattered by combat finds the possibility of redemption in a relationship with an eleven-year-old girl abandoned by her father. In French with English subtitles. (1962) 110 min.

Zero for Conduct This early French classic of kids rebelling at a French boarding school illustrates the vitality of childhood better than perhaps any other film ever made. In French with English subtitles. (1933) 49 min.

ADOLESCENCE FILMS

American Graffiti Events that happen to a group of Modesto, California, teenagers the day after high school graduation. (1973) 112 min.

Aparajito (The Unvanquished) The second of Indian director Satyajit Ray’s Apu trilogy follows Apu through his university days. In Hindi with English subtitles. (1958) 108 min.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz An eighteen-year-old (played by Richard Dreyfuss in one of his earliest performances) struggles to make it

big in the Jewish neighborhoods of 1948 Montreal. (1974) 121 min.

Back to the Future Teenager (Michael J. Fox) travels back to the 1950s and meets his parents as adolescents. (1985) 116 min.

Boyz N the Hood This coming of age story set in South Central L.A. depicts the negative impact of neighborhood violence as well as the positive influence of strong parenting with an African-American teen played by Cuba Gooding Jr. (1991) 112 min.

Breaking Away A Midwestern youth seeks to break away from his parents and working-class background as he moves toward adulthood. (1979) 100 min.

Closely Watched Trains Sensitive Czech film about a young man who seeks his identity as a man, both sexually and politically. In Czech with English subtitles. (1966) 89 min.

Dead Poets Society A prep school teacher (played by Robin Williams) inspires several young men to "seize the day" and follow their passions, in one case with catastrophic results. (1989) 128 min.

Gregory's Girl A young boy in Scotland falls for the new girl in school who is also an expert soccer player. This enchanting film captures the awkwardness of adolescence as well as its capriciousness, self-consciousness, and improvisational quality. (1980) 91 min.

If . . . Students at a British boarding school revolt in this violent remake of Jean Vigo's *Zero de Conduit* (Zero for Conduct). (1969) 111 min.

The Last Picture Show A young man living in a small Texas town graduates from high school and learns about adulthood from an aging cowboy and a lonely middle-aged woman. (1971) 118 min.

Peggy Sue Got Married A woman at midlife collapses at her high school reunion and travels back in time to re-experience her turbulent adolescent days with plenty of hindsight to guide her this time around. (1986) 103 min.

Peppermint Soda Teenage sisters in 1960s Paris encounter love, menstruation rites, leftist politics, incompetent teachers, and changing friendships in this autobiographical debut film by director Diane Kurys. In French with English subtitles. (1977) 97 min.

Rebel Without a Cause Still relevant James Dean debut film illustrates several key issues of adolescence, including separation from parents, inner emotional turmoil, peer initiation rites, and preoccupation with existential questions. (1955) 111 min.

Salaam Bombay Portrays the lives of young adolescents living on the streets of Bombay amid drugs, prostitution, and poverty. In Hindi with English subtitles. (1988) 113 min.

Sixteen Candles A day in the life of a socially inhibited girl whose family forgets her sixteenth birthday. (1984) 93 min.

Splendor in the Grass A study of teenage sexuality and what happens when a young girl (played by Natalie Wood) is frustrated by restrictive parental/societal forces. (1961) 124 min.

Stand and Deliver Tells the story of a group of Hispanic high school students who find their world transformed by a charismatic teacher. Several excellent scenes show the positive impact a mentor can have on the lives of impressionable teens. (1988) 105 min.

The Sterile Cuckoo An odd but strangely satisfying movie about an unstable girl (played by Liza Minnelli) who forces her way into the life of a naive but clear-headed college freshman. (1969) 108 min.

Streetwise A frank and heartbreaking documentary about runaways struggling to survive on the streets of Seattle. (1984) 92 min.

Summer of ’42 Poignant coming-of-age story of two fifteen-year-old boys who lose their virginity in very different ways. (1971) 102 min.

Walkabout An aboriginal youth interrupts his own rite of passage in the wilderness to help two children reach safety in the Australian outback.

(1971) 100 min.

Welcome to the Dollhouse Junior high school as Dante's *Inferno.* A seventh-grade girl endures insults and abuse from classmates, siblings, and parents, while somehow managing to keep going in spite of it all. (1995) 87 min.

West Side Story Musical re-creation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is also a superb textbook on gangs, the bloom of young love, and the death wish in adolescence. (1961) 151 min.

Y Tu Mamá También Two brash adolescent males are initiated into the emotional and sexual complexities of adulthood by an older woman on a trip through rural Mexico. In Spanish with English subtitles. (2001) 105 min.

EARLY ADULTHOOD FILMS

Bed and Board A twenty-six-year-old assistant florist marries, has a child, and then an affair, struggling all the while with his own immaturity. The fourth film in François Truffaut's Antoine Doinel cycle. In French with English subtitles. (1970) 100 min.

The Big Chill College friends gather in their thirties to reconnect and reignite old developmental wounds as they begin to wonder about what comes next in their lives. (1983) 108 min.

Billy Liar Painful story of a young working class man in England who cannot face the demands of moving into life as a full-fledged adult and continually escapes into fantasies as a defense. (1963) 94 min.

The Brothers McMullen Traces the lives of three brothers in their twenties and thirties as they struggle with issues of intimacy, their Catholic faith, and individuation. (1994) 98 min.

Crossing Delancey A Jewish woman in her early thirties confronts the challenges of making it in the publishing world, the delights and hurts of courtship with a pickle merchant, and the constraints of her Old World relatives. (1988) 97 min.

Diner Several men in their early twenties hang out at a diner in 1959 Baltimore and cope with the realities of tenuous relationships with women, old childhood dependencies, and financial difficulties. (1982) 110 min.

The Graduate A recent college graduate who has focused only on academic achievement and pleasing his parents faces the materialism and sexuality of the adult world as he struggles for intimacy and a sense of self. (1967) 106 min.

Groundhog Day Phil Connors (Bill Murray) has an eternity of February 2nds to try out different strategies for snaring Rita (Andie MacDowell), the love of his life, before discovering the secrets of true intimacy. (1993) 103 min.

High Fidelity A thirtysomething owner of a retro vinyl record store (John Cusack) looks back at his past relationship failures and struggles toward a new sense of commitment and intimacy with his current partner. (2000) 113 min.

How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying Bright and satiric musical about a young businessman learning to do whatever it takes to advance up the corporate ladder of success. (1967) 121 min.

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner A young man does time in a British reformatory, and while training for a long distance competition, reflects on his life and the society that seems to conspire against him. (1962) 104 min.

Love on the Run A man divorces his wife and has entanglements with other women from his past and present. The fifth and final installment of François Truffaut's Antoine Doinel series (which also includes *The 400 Blows, Antoine & Colette*, *Stolen Kisses,* and *Bed and Board*). In French with English subtitles. (1978) 95 min.

Marty Lonely working man in his twenties who lives with his mother struggles for intimacy and finds it. (1955) 91 min.

Now Voyager A young woman (Bette Davis) has difficulty breaking away from her critical mother and making her way in life, until she works with a psychiatrist (Paul Henreid) and goes on a South American cruise. (1942) 117 min.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man Film treatment of James Joyce's novel depicts the emotional, moral, and intellectual struggles of a sensitive young Irish writer as he attempts to form an identity apart from his roots. (1979) 93 min.

Stolen Kisses A man in his early twenties is discharged from the military as unfit for service, and bounces from one job to another seeking to find his place in the world. The third installment of François Truffaut's Antoine Doinel series. In French with English subtitles. (1968) 90 min.

Stranger Than Paradise Oddball documentary-style film that reveals the hilariously empty lives of three Hungarians who beautifully illustrate the tentativeness of life in early adulthood. (1984) 90 min.

The Sweet Smell of Success Tony Curtis plays a manipulative young newspaper reporter trying to make it big in New York City. (1957) 96 min.

Ticket to Heaven Documentary-style film shows the vulnerability of a young man going through the turmoil of a broken relationship, who falls into the clutches of a religious cult and the equally manipulative influence of a cult deprogrammer. (1981) 109 min.

Why Shoot the Teacher An innocent young man starts his first teaching job in a rural Canadian one-room schoolhouse. (1979) 101 min.

The World of Apu The last of Indian director Satyajit Ray's trilogy of films about a young man named Apu. In this film, Apu struggles in early adulthood to make a living, marries and fathers a child, and confronts tragedy. In Hindi with English subtitles. (1959) 103 min.

Zorba the Greek A young English writer has his quiet cerebral existence upset and positively transformed by a lusty Greek peasant. (1964) 142 min.

MIDLIFE FILMS

8½ Protagonist filmmaker faces midlife crisis after mega success (patterned after director Federico Fellini's own life history). In Italian with English subtitles. (1963) 135 min.

All About Eve Bette Davis plays a forty-year-old Broadway actor who faces competition from a younger protégée. (1950) 138 min.

Come Back, Little Sheba Shirley Booth's Academy Award-winning performance mourns the loss of youth, love, and her little dog, Sheba. (1952) 99 min.

Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean This Robert Altman film based on a Broadway play chronicles the twenty-year reunion of four women who reveal the pain and emptiness of their growing-up years. (1982) 109 min.

La Dolce Vita Director Federico Fellini follows the circuitous journey of a jaded journalist trying to find meaning in the tempests of modern life in Rome. In Italian with English subtitles. (1960) 174 min.

My Dinner with Andre Two men discuss their midlife perspectives and adventures (which in the case of one of them become progressively bizarre) during a 110-minute dinner conversation. (1981) 110 min.

The Swimmer This neglected gem of a film tells the story of a man (played by Burt Lancaster) swimming from pool to pool in a wealthy Connecticut neighborhood, who conjures up idealized memories and confronts past failures as he attempts to make it all the way home. (1968) 94 min.

An Unmarried Woman A woman undergoes a major transformation when her husband of many years walks out on her. (1978) 124 min.

Vanya on 42nd Street A forty-seven-year-old Russian property manager (portrayed by Wallace Shawn) rails in bitterness over having wasted his life supporting a hypocritical father-in-law. David Mamet adapted the Anton

Chekhov play *Uncle Vanya* in Louis Malle's last feature film. (1994) 119 min.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? A washed-up fortyish college professor (played by Richard Burton) and his abusive wife (played by a middle-aged Elizabeth Taylor) spend a wild night with a younger married couple just getting started in the world of academia. (1966) 127 min.

MATURE ADULTHOOD FILMS

About Schmidt Newly retired insurance executive (Jack Nicholson) goes on the road in a giant RV in order to deal with his deep sense of purposelessness and his perceived failures as a husband and father. (2002) 124 min.

Atlantic City Burt Lancaster is superb as an over-the-hill mobster who has the chance to commit an act of great moral courage. (1981) 104 min. *Central Station* A lonely and frustrated older woman befriends a young boy whose mother has just been killed, and together they embark on a long journey from Rio de Janeiro to the northernmost part of Brazil on a quest for the boy's father. In Portuguese with English subtitles. (1998) 110 min.

Death of a Salesman Dustin Hoffman puts fury and pathos into the role of Willy Loman, a sixty-something over-the-hill traveling salesman who hangs on to the illusions of the past while being confronted with the realities of his failures over the years. (1985) TV movie, 135 min.

The Iceman Cometh Middle-aged men in a New York saloon are disabused of their illusions about "making it" in this remake of Eugene O'Neill's classic play. (1973) 259 min.

The Remains of the Day The story of a middle-aged English butler whose emotional blocks stunt his ability to develop intimacy, express generativity, or achieve integrity. (1993) 135 min.

Seconds A failed middle-aged businessman gets a second chance at life by living in the robust body of a young man (played by Rock Hudson). (1966) 107 min.

That's Life! Middle-aged man (Jack Lemmon) frets about aging and imaginary illnesses while his wife (Julie Andrews) secretly faces a real threat to her own life. (1986) 102 min.

LATE ADULTHOOD FILMS

Cocoon Don Ameche leads a group of seniors to the fountain of youth ina nearby swimming pool in this tale about finding vitality in elderhood. (1985) 117 min.

Driving Miss Daisy An aging white Southern lady forges a deep bond with her black chauffeur as they move together through the years. (1989) 99 min.

The Entertainer Follows the decline of an aging British music hall entertainer(played by Sir Laurence Olivier) as it touches all aspects of his life. (1960)104 min.

Fried Green Tomatoes A woman in a retirement home gives new life to an overweight and sexually frustrated younger woman by telling her the story of her life. (1991) 130 min.

Harold and Maude A suicidal young man falls in love with an old woman with a zest for life in this black comedy directed by Hal Ashby. (1971) 92 min.

Harry and Tonto A tale of a seventy-two-year-old man's Odyssey around the country after being evicted from his New York apartment. (1974) 115 min.

I Never Sang for My Father Powerful drama of a writer facing unresolved feelings toward his newly widowed eighty-year-old father. Contains excellent segments illustrating the life review process in late adulthood. (1970) 90 min.

On Golden Pond Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn play an aged couple struggling with family conflicts, physical decline, and impending death at a summer lake cottage. (1981) 109 min.

A Sunday in the Country A widowed grandfather in his seventies who has etched a name for himself in the world of pre–World War I French art is visited by his family, during which we see his failures as a father and an artist. In French with English subtitles. (1984) 94 min.

Sunset Boulevard An aging movie star (played by aging movie star Gloria Swanson) seeks youth through romance with a struggling young writer. (1950) 100 min.

The Sunshine Boys George Burns and Walter Matthau play two retired vaudeville actors who try to team up again for one last show but find that the past is a formidable obstacle to the show's success. (1975) 111 min.

Tokyo Story An elderly couple leaves their rural home to visit their children in the big city, only to be treated as an inconvenience in the midst of their children's (and grandchildren's) busy urban lives. Voted as one of the top ten films of all time by *Sight and Sound* magazine. (1953) 134 min.

The Trip to Bountiful An old woman caught in the crossfire between her troubled son and daughter-in-law flees to Bountiful, the town of her birth. (1985) 102 min.

Umberto D An elderly Italian man is evicted from his apartment and has only his dog as a companion. Unlike *Harry and Tonto*, the ending is not a happy one. In Italian with English subtitles. (1955) 89 min.

The Whales of August Two sisters (Lillian Gish in her last screen role and Bette Davis still recovering from a stroke in real life) cope with the problems of aging and their incompatible personalities in this charmer of a film set on the seacoast of Maine. (1987) 91 min.

DEATH AND DYING FILMS

All That Jazz This musical fantasy illustrates the five stages of dying and shows a death experience (with Jessica Lange as the angel of death). (1979) 120 min.

The Barbarian Invasions A hedonistic history professor suffering from advanced cancer struggles to come to grips with his past as he is joined by family and friends from all over the world who have gathered in Quebec to help him die. In French with English subtitles. (2003) 99 min. (112 min. in Canadian version).

Cries and Whispers A woman's painful death from cancer is the impetus for her sisters to explore their own decaying lives and the possibilities of intimacy and passion. In Swedish with English subtitles. (1972) 91 min.

Dark Victory Bette Davis portrays a wealthy heiress with a terminal illness who confronts the denial of death in herself and in her close friends. (1939) 106 min.

Ikiru A petty bureaucrat learns he has terminal stomach cancer and attempts to salvage his meaningless life in this classic Japanese film by director Akira Kurosawa. In Japanese with English subtitles. (1952) 134 min.

Last Holiday A confirmed bachelor and bank clerk (played by Alec Guinness) is told he has only six weeks to live and goes to a luxury resort to play out his last days on earth. (1950) 89 min.

The Loved One Mordant satire on the funeral industry (and many other things American, besides) based on Evelyn Waugh's trenchant novel. (1965) 118 min.

Resurrection Ellen Burstyn plays a young woman who has a near-death experience in a car accident and receives healing powers as a result. (1980) 103 min.

The Shootist An infamous and aged gunslinger returns to his old haunts in Carson City, Nevada, to die in this poignant film starring legendary cowboy hero John Wayne in his last screen appearance; Wayne himself was dying of lung cancer at the time. (1976) 100 min.

Six Feet Under This HBO television series portrays a family in Pasadena, California who owns a funeral home. The series explores the complexities

and ambiguities of death and dying, along with the meanings and mysteries of living. (63 episodes, 55 min. each)

BEYOND DEATH FILMS

After Life People who have died spend a week at a social service agency where they must select one memory from their lives to spend eternity with. In Japanese with English subtitles. (1998) 118 min.

Angel on My Shoulder A murdered convict, played by Paul Muni, is sent back to earth as a judge to make things right. (1946) 101 min.

Black Orpheus A streetcar conductor follows his dead love into the underworld in this cinematic treatment of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice set in modern-day Rio de Janeiro during Carnival. In Portuguese with English subtitles. (1958) 103 min.

Defending Your Life A man dies in a car crash and ends up in a courtroom-like waiting station called Judgment City where he must justify the actions of his self-absorbed life. (1991) 112 min.

Heaven Can Wait A character played by Don Ameche dies and tells the story of his life to the devil and finds his life wasn't as bad as he thought. (1943) 112 min.

Heaven Can Wait A pro football player (Warren Beatty) dies and returns to Earth as a multimillionaire/philanthropist in this remake of *Here Comes Mr. Jordan.* (1978) 101 min.

Here Comes Mr. Jordan A boxer is snatched up to heaven fifty years before his appointed time and has to go back to Earth and inhabit the body of a murdered millionaire. (1941) 94 min.

Appendix B

BOOKS TO HELP THROUGHOUT THE LIFE SPAN

As research and knowledge has expanded over the past four decades concerning the human life span, a wide range of popular books have been published that provide practical advice for readers who are seeking information to help them cope with the problems of daily living at each stage of life. Expectant mothers look for up-to-date information on nurturing their unborn babies and preparing for childbirth. Parents want solid advice on raising their children and adolescents, and strategies for helping them in school and preparing them for life. Young adults need guidance in finding jobs, mates, and housing. Midlifers and those in mature and late adulthood seek books that provide information about staying healthy, revitalizing relationships, and finding new meaning and purpose in the second half of life. With the increased awareness of death and dying, and the growth of hospice programs nationwide, people are also looking for books to help them prepare for this final stage of life and what may lie beyond. This bibliography contains a small sample of the many books currently available to guide readers through the twelve stages of life. All are currently in print. Where alternative versions of a title are available, the least expensive version (usually paperback) is the one listed. Virtually all of these titles can be ordered through any local independent or chain bookstore, or purchased through online bookstores.

Prebirth Books

Luminare-Rosen, Carista. *Parenting Begins Before Conception: A Guide to Preparing Your Body, Mind, and Spirit for You and Your Future Child*. Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2000. A practical guide to preparing

mothers for pregnancy and birth using tools from both Eastern and Western psychologies.

Nathanielcz, Peter W., with Christopher Vaughn. *The Prenatal Prescription*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Advice for parents-to-be on proper nutrition, stress reduction, and avoidance of toxins, and how these factors help to create a positive prenatal environment that will set the stage for a healthy life for the child after birth, and even protect her against heart disease, stroke, and other diseases when she reaches adulthood.

Tsiaras, Alexander, and Barry Werth. *From Conception to Birth: A Life Unfolds*. New York: Doubleday, 2002. A visual diary of fetal development through computer imaging.

Verny, Thomas, and Pamela Weintraub. *Pre-Parenting: Nurturing Your Child from Conception*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. Offers practical advice for expectant parents on nurturing their preborn child based upon recent findings from neuroscience and developmental psychology.

Wirth, Frederick. *Prenatal Parenting: The Complete Psychological and Spiritual Guide to Loving Your Unborn Child*. New York: Regan Books, 2001. Provides the expectant mother with guidelines on how to handle stress that might interfere with the fetus's emotional development, how to communicate with the fetus, and how to foster a spiritual environment between mother and child.

Birth Books

Arms, Suzanne. *Immaculate Deception II.* Revised edition. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 2000. Critiques the disease-based medical model approach to birthing, and describes a wide range of positive alternative birthing practices that ease the fear of childbirth and provide an atmosphere of love, trust, and comfort for the child about to be born.

England, Pam, and Rob Horowitz. *Birthing from Within: An Extraordinary Guide to Childbirth Preparation*. Albuquerque, NM: Partera Press, 1998. Includes meditations, writing exercises, and other activities for expectant mothers to help them learn to trust their own innate knowledge of the birth

process, and to become savvy about the world of modern hospital culture before they give birth.

Harper, Barbara, with Suzanne Arms. *Gentle Birth Choices: A Guide to Making Informed Decisions About Birthing Centers, Birth Attendants, Water Birth, Home Birth, Hospital Birth*. New York: Healing Arts Press, 2005. A sensible guide that dispels myths about conventional hospital birth, offers birthing alternatives, gives practical tools for communicating with doctors and midwives, and provides guidance in constructing a plan for giving birth in a gentle and nurturing way.

Leboyer, Frederick. *Birth Without Violence: Revised Edition of the Classic*. New York: Healing Arts Press, 2009. Shows how to create an atmosphere of tranquility during the birth process using relaxation, a quiet and soothing environment, and other techniques to reduce the trauma of birth.

Lothian, Judith, and Charlotte DeVries. *Giving Birth with Confidence* (Official Lamaze Guide, 3rd Edition). Cambridge, MA: DeCapo Books, 2017. A comprehensive guide to the Lamaze method of birth, which emphasizes breathing and relaxation techniques to ease pain.

McCutcheon, Susan. *Natural Childbirth the Bradley Way: Revised Edition.* New York: Plume, 2018. A step-by-step introduction to the Bradley method of natural childbirth, which was the first major alternative birthing method to emphasize the role of the father in the birth process and the avoidance of drugs for the mother during birth.

Infancy Books

Gotsch, Gwen, Anwar Fazal, and Judy Torgus. *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding: Completely Revised and Updated 8th Edition*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2010. The La Leche League International's classic guide to breastfeeding includes a comprehensive rationale for breastfeeding as well as lots of practical support for mothers in dealing with the logistics of breastfeeding.

Leach, Penelope. *Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age Five*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. From diaper rash and teething to language development and play, this comprehensive guide to the first five years of

life is one of the most popular and practical guides for parents of young children. (See also Early Childhood.)

Liedloff, Jean. *The Continuum Concept: In Search of Happiness Lost*. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Books, 1986. Based upon her experiences with indigenous cultures in South America, Liedloff constructs a modern rationale for maintaining an environment of emotional and physical closeness between mother and child during the first years of life. (See also Early Childhood.)

Sears, William, and Martha Sears. *The Baby Book: Everything You Need to Know About Your Baby from Birth to Age Two.* Revised and updated edition. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 2013. Nuts-and-bolts guide to raising baby, covering such topics as teething, toilet training, feeding, carrying baby, breastfeeding, dealing with bothersome behaviors, baby proofing the house, and much more.

Small, Meredith. *Our Babies, Ourselves: How Biology and Culture Shape the Way We Parent*. New York: Anchor Books, 1999. A fascinating look into the anthropological and evolutionary basis for using appropriate methods to nurture babies.

Early Childhood Books

Auerbach, Stevanne. *Dr. Toy's Smart Play: How to Raise a Child with a High PQ (Play Quotient)*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Practical guide to selecting toys for children from infancy to preteen includes information on toy safety, gender issues, and the importance of play to a child's development.

Elkind, David. *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. Criticizes the tendency in educational circles to make preschool environments less play-oriented and more academic, arguing that such developmentally inappropriate practices create stress for young children and fail to nurture their young minds.

Hunt, Jan, and Peggy O'Mara. *The Natural Child: Parenting from the Heart*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001. Takes a loving child-centered perspective toward parenting and education in speaking out

against spanking, labeling (as ADHD, LD, etc.), and other forms of child coercion, while offering tips for raising a happy child. (See also Birth, Infancy, Middle Childhood, and Late Childhood.)

Olfman, Sharna (ed.). *All Work and No Play: How Educational Reforms Are Harming Our Preschoolers*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. A series of chapters that raise alarm at the demise of natural play among children, and the rise of stress-producing technologies such as computers, video games, and standardized testing.

Pearce, Joseph Chilton. *Magical Child*. New York: Plume, 1992. A celebration of the child's intrinsic wisdom and imagination, and a critique of modern methods of birthing, child rearing, and education that eliminate the magic from childhood. (See also Prebirth, Birth, Infancy, Middle Childhood, and Late Childhood.)

Middle Childhood Books

Armstrong, Thomas. *In Their Own Way: Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Multiple Intelligences.* Revised and updated edition. New York: Tarcher, 2000. An introduction for parents and educators to Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, and how to use a knowledge of the different intelligences to help children succeed in school and in life. (See also, Early Childhood, Late Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Elkind, David. *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast, Too Soon.* 25th Anniversary Edition. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Books, 2006. Examines how pressures in our culture to push kids too quickly into adulthood are causing an epidemic of stress-related problems. (See also Early Childhood and Late Childhood.)

Healy, Jane. *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It*. New York: Touchstone, 1999. Examines the dangers of modern media, including television, computers, and the Internet, in short-circuiting the natural brain development and thinking processes of children. (See also Early Childhood, Late Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Holt, John Caldwell. *How Children Fail*. Revised edition. Boulder, CO: Perseus Publishing, 1995. This classic text on alternative education reveals how schools are designed to produce students who have less concern with learning and more concern with trying to figure out the rules of a fundamentally incoherent educational system. (See also Late Childhood and Adolescence.)

Llewellyn, Grace, and Amy Silver. *Guerrilla Learning: How to Give Your Kids a Real Education With or Without School*. New York: John Wiley, 2001. Shows parents how to utilize everyday resources to give their children a brilliant education based on direct experience instead of artificial classroom tasks. (See also Early Childhood, Late Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Late Childhood Books

Gianetti, Charlene C., and Margaret Sagarese. *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*. New York: Broadway, 1997. Guidance for parents on helping your "middler" (ten- to fifteen-year-old) with issues such as sibling rivalry, getting organized, handling conflict, school difficulties, and dealing with emotions.

Hartley-Brewer, Elizabeth. *Talking to Tweens: Getting It Right Before It Gets Rocky with Your 8- to 12-Year-Old*. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Books, 2005. Provides advice for parents on creating a balance between staying close to your children and, at the same time, letting them become themselves.

Mosatche, Harriet, and Karen Under. *Too Old For This, Too Young for That! Your Survival Guide for the Middle School Years*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2010. This book is designed for kids in grades five through eight to help them deal with their changing bodies, self-esteem, family relationships, school, and extracurricular activities.

Rimm, Sylvia. *Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers*. New York: Rodale Press, 2006. A child psychologist shares the results of a survey of more than 5,400 middle school kids, revealing that children at this age face pressures (e.g., sex,

drugs, body image) that used to begin in high school. Provides advice for parents on how to help their kids cope in an increasingly complicated world.

Rosenberg, Ellen. *Get a Clue! What's Really Going on with Pre-Teens and How Parents Can Help*. New York: Owl Books/Henry Holt, 1999. Offers guidelines for parents on how to talk to their preteens on topics such as peer pressure, sexuality, teasing, and drugs.

Adolescence Books

Armstrong, Thomas. *The Power of the Adolescent Brain*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2016. Surveys the past two decades of neuroscience research on adolescent brain development, and recommends specific educational practices that are adolescent "brain friendly.''

Elkind, David. *All Grown Up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis.* Revised edition. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Books, 1998. One of America's leading developmental psychologists looks at how today's fast-paced culture makes the transition from childhood into adulthood exceedingly difficult, and even dangerous for many teenagers, and provides practical advice to parents for helping adolescents cope with the changes going on inside and outside of them.

Hersch, Patricia. *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1999. The author spent three years following eight "regular" teenagers in a "typical" American town, recording their concerns, rituals, and needs from the inside out, and coming to some disturbing conclusions about how American adults abandon their adolescents, leaving them to find their own way in a confusing world.

Kindlon, Daniel J., and Michael Thompson. *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2000. The authors describe how boys in contemporary life are coerced into a culture of cruelty and a too-narrow definition of masculinity that stunts their emotional growth. The book provides seven tips for what boys really need to develop into mature men. (See also Middle Childhood and Late Childhood.)

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005. Despite decades of women's liberation, this adolescent psychotherapist argues that today's girls are caught in a "girl-poisoning culture" that emphasizes looks and other media stereotypes for feminine behavior, while squelching the inner spirit. (See also Middle Childhood and Late Childhood.)

Strauch, Barbara. *The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries About the Teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids*. New York: Anchor, 2004. Reviews recent research on the adolescent's changing brain to help explain to parents some of the reasons for their teenagers' erratic behaviors, roller-coaster moods, and "in-your-face" attitudes.

Early Adulthood Books

Bourland, Julia. *The Go-Girl Guide: Surviving Your 20s with Savvy, Soul, and Style*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. A practical and humorous guide to help young female adults cope with everything from dating and relationships to job hunting and avoiding credit debt.

Furman, Elina, and Leah Furman. *The Everything After College Book: Real-World Advice for Surviving and Thriving on Your Own*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 1998. Help for the recent college graduate on practical life skills such as finding an apartment, dealing with your family, cooking for one person, and making new friends.

Jedding, Kenneth. *Real Life Notes: Reflections and Strategies for Life After Graduation*. New York, NY: Double Rose Books, 2002. A self-help book for young adults that includes advice on how to figure out what you really want to do with your life, how to survive entry-level jobs, and how to relate to your parents in a new way.

Kobliner, Beth. *Get a Financial Life: Personal Finance in Your Twenties and Thirties*. New York: Touchstone, 2017. Covers such topics as planning financial goals, understanding how the world of money works, saving up for a home, and paying taxes.

Robbins, Alexandra, and Abby Wilner. *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*. New York: Tarcher, 2001. Using

personal accounts from the lives of twentysomethings, this book argues that there is a “quarterlife crisis” that precedes the more famous “midlife crisis” of the thirties and forties.

Midlife Books

Brehony, Kathleen A. *Awakening at Midlife: A Guide to Reviving Your Spirits, Recreating Your Life, and Returning to Your Truest Self*. New York: Riverhead, 1997. This book, written by a Jungian psychotherapist, provides activities for retrieving childhood memories, understanding the unconscious, caring for the body, and reconnecting with one’s deepest spiritual beliefs as a way of navigating through the midlife passage. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Chinen, Allan. *Once Upon a Midlife*. New York: Tarcher/Perigee, 1993. A psychiatrist examines fairy tales from around the world that deal with midlife issues including mortality, gender attitudes, spirituality, and creative renewal. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Edelstein, Linda N. *The Art of Midlife: Courage and Creative Living for Women*. Bergin & Garvey, 1999. This book celebrates the voices of women at midlife reflecting on issues such as letting go of the old, reconnecting with a deeper place, and realizing creative potentials. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Gerzon, Mark. *Listening to Midlife: Turning Your Crisis into a Quest*. Boston: Shambhala, 1996. Using stories from his own life and those of others, the author encourages readers to craft their own unique way through the midlife passage by encountering family, work, and self with courage and creativity. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Sheehy, Gail. *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life*. New York: Dutton, 2013. This is the classic book that launched “midlife crisis” as a term used in popular culture. Sheehy has written several follow-up books on midlife and mature adulthood including, *New Passages*, *Understanding Men’s Passages*, and *The Silent Passage* (a book about menopause). (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Mature Adulthood Books

Cohen, Gene. *The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life*. New York: Perennial Currents, 2001. This book provides a positive perspective on aging by examining recent brain research and by providing numerous examples of individuals who reached their peak of creativity in the second half of life. Also available is Cohen's *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*. New York: Basic Books, 2005. (See also Midlife and Late Adulthood.)

Kotre, John. *Make it Count: How to Generate a Legacy that Gives Meaning to Your Life*. New York: Free Press, 1999. Provides a step-by-step program for anyone in their thirties, forties, fifties, or beyond, to help overcome obstacles in midlife through the creation of meaningful generative projects that endure beyond one's own individual existence.

Roszak, Theodore. *Longevity Revolution: As Boomers Become Elders*. Albany, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2001. A cultural historian explores how the phenomenon of people living longer can serve as a positive social force. (See also Midlife and Late Adulthood.)

Schacter-Shalomi, Zalman. *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2014. A rabbi describes how people in the second half of life can practice the art of "eldering" by engaging in spiritual practices, creating meaningful rituals, and giving to others. (See also Midlife and Late Adulthood.)

Snowden, David. *Aging with Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Leading Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives*. New York: Bantam, 2002. The author has studied a group of aging nuns who have followed a tradition of lifelong learning and good health habits, and in the process has made some interesting discoveries about the art of healthy aging. (See also Midlife and Late Adulthood.)

Vaillant, George. *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 2003. A Harvard psychiatrist uses several long-term studies of human development to come to important conclusions about what factors contribute to happiness in old age. (See also Midlife and Late Adulthood.)

Late Adulthood Books

Cassel, Christine K., ed. *The Practical Guide to Aging: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. Provides advice on late life issues such as managing multiple medications, finding housing, dealing with legal issues, and handling finances. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Enkelis, Liane. *On Being 100: Centenarians Share Their Extraordinary Lives and Wisdom*. Roseville, CA: Prima, 2000. An intimate collection of photos and interviews with thirty men and women who reached the age of one hundred.

Friedan, Betty. *The Fountain of Age*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. The author of the *Feminine Mystique* turns her critical gaze on modern culture's depreciation of the elderly, challenging elders to not buy into ageist myths but instead to create new and positive roles for themselves. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Olshansky, S. Jay, and Bruce A. Carnes. *The Quest for Immortality: Science at the Frontiers of Aging*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002. Debunks the claims of those who believe that herbs, potions, vitamins, diets, or hormones can indefinitely prolong life. Explores the science of aging in light of recent medical discoveries. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Perls, Thomas T., and Margery Hutter Silver, with John F. Lauerman. *Living to 100: Lessons to Living to Your Maximum Potential at Any Age*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Offers some startling revelations about the good health of many centenarians and examines factors that improve one's odds of reaching an advanced age (the book includes a life expectancy calculator).

Death and Dying Books

Duda, Deborah. *Coming Home: A Guide to Dying at Home with Dignity.* Deborah Duda, 2010. A practical guide that relates the author's very personal experiences of attending to two home deaths, while offering sage advice for deciding when a home death is the best choice, plus hundreds of

tips on day-to-day concerns including medical issues, legal help, creating a comfortable environment, and planning a burial and service.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth, and David Kessler. *Life's Lessons: Two Experts on Death and Dying Teach Us about the Mysteries of Life and Living*. New York: Scribner, 2014. Personal accounts of how encountering death in ourselves and others helps us complete unfinished business, live life to its fullest, and open ourselves up to love.

Lattanzi-Licht, Marcia, with John J. Mahoney and Galen W. Miller. *The Hospice Choice: In Pursuit of a Peaceful Death*. New York: Fireside, 1998. An excellent introduction to the hospice movement, offering information on hospice services, and giving a wide range of scenarios to show how hospice adapts to individual needs. Provides personal accounts of families, professionals, and volunteers going through the hospice experience as a team.

Levine, Stephen, and Ondrea Levine. *Who Dies? An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying*. New York: Anchor Press, 1989. An investigation into the process of dying using the author's own personal experiences gleaned from Buddhist, Hindu, and other mystical traditions. Includes a number of meditation exercises designed to help heal the fear of death and life.

Lynn, Joanne, and Joan Harrold. *Handbook for Mortals: Guidance for People Facing Serious Illness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. A comprehensive practical guide to issues related to death and dying, including pain management, resolving old business, how to talk to doctors, finding meaning in loss, decision making as a family, and methods of foregoing medical treatment to avoid a long drawn-out dying process.

Beyond Death Books

Johnson, Christopher Jay, and Marsha G. McGee. *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife.* Second edition. Philadelphia: The Charles Press, 1998. Provides straightforward descriptions of how twenty religious traditions view death and the afterlife, written by experts in each faith. Includes a chapter of special questions that are answered from the

perspective of each tradition (e.g., “what happens to people who commit suicide?” etc.).

Miller, Sukie. *After Life: How People Around the World Map the Journey after We Die*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. Drawing on her own experience as a psychotherapist as well as on research-based interviews with shamans, priests, and holy men in India, Brazil, Indonesia, West Africa, and the United States, the author identifies and describes four distinct stages that appear to underlie many, if not most, of the world’s cultural traditions: waiting, judgment, possibilities, and return.

Moody, Raymond. *Life after Life: The Bestselling Original Investigation that Revealed Near-Death Experiences*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015. An investigation into the cases of more than a hundred individuals who were declared clinically dead and then, on being revived, told stories about encountering tunnels, light, guardians, and ineffable joy “on the other side” of death.

Schwartz, Gary E. *The Afterlife Experiments: Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life after Death*. New York: Fireside, 2003. Using scientific research methods, this University of Arizona psychologist attempts to provide rational evidence of life after death by correlating information gathered from “psychics” communicating with dead relatives and friends with that of “sitters” who are blocked off from any contact with the mediums.

Appendix C

ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

It takes a community of concerned and involved citizens to guide the growth of human beings from conception to the final moments of death and beyond. The following list of organizations and Websites is a preliminary attempt at pulling together a "stages of life yellow pages" to assist individuals who wish to pool their energies with others working to support people at each stage of the life cycle, or who themselves wish to benefit from the services that these groups offer. Listed here are organizations that fund scientific research into birth defects and Alzheimer's disease; telephone hotlines providing instant access for those wishing to report child abuse or elder abuse; websites offering comprehensive information about adolescence, job training, and death and dying; volunteer groups mentoring at-risk children or young adults; and much more. Many of the organizations provide seminars, conferences, specialized training, periodicals or journals, books and pamphlets, video programs, or other materials that offer useful information on a specific stage of life. To help the reader contact each organization, I've listed multiple sources of contact, including (when available): mailing address, regular phone number (and if available, toll-free phone number), fax number, e-mail address, and Website URL.

Prebirth Organizations

The Association for Pre- & Perinatal Psychology and Health, 2010 West Avenue K, #1042 Lancaster, CA 93536-5229; Phone: 720-4905612; Email: admindirector@birthpsychology.com; Website: www .birthpsychology.com.

Holds yearly conferences and publishes a journal and newsletter on recent research in the psychological dimensions of prenatal care.

March of Dimes, 1275 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains, NY 10605. Website: www.marchofdimes.org. Funds research and educational programs that fight the problems of prematurity, birth defects, and low birth weight.

National Perinatal Association, P.O. Box 392, Lonedell, MO 63060. Phone: (314) 440-7454; Email: info@nationalperinatal.org. Coalition of health-care professionals seeking to improve social, cultural, and economic conditions for expectant mothers. (See also Birth.)

Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 123 William St. 10th Floor, New York, NY 10038. Phone: 1-800-430-4907; Website: www.plannedparenthood.org. Provides support in reproductive health care, sexuality, methods of contraception, abortion, and other areas to help ensure that every baby born is a wanted and cared-for baby.

The Visible Embryo, Website: http://www.visembryo.com/baby/index.html. This Website offers clickable images and accompanying information representing the first forty weeks of pregnancy.

Birth Organizations

American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM), 8403 Colesville Rd, Suite 1550 | Silver Spring MD 20910; Phone: 240-485-1800; Fax: 240-485-1818; Website: www.midwife.org. The oldest woman's healthcare organization in the United States, ACNM provides certification of nurse-midwives and midwives, establishes clinical practice standards, offers continuing education programs, and creates liaisons with state and federal agencies and members of Congress. (See also Prebirth.)

Birthing the Future, P.O. Box 1040, Bayfield, CO 81122; Phone: 970-884-4005; Email: suzannebirthing@gmail.com; Website: www.birthingthefuture.org. The Website of birth activist Suzanne Arms includes information critical of conventional medical-institutional birthing practices, as well as a wide range of alternative resources for birth and infant care based upon a wellness paradigm. (See also Prebirth, Infancy.)

Improving Birth Coalition; Website: www.motherfriendly.org. The nation's largest maternity care consumer advocacy organization. Seeks to promote a wellness model of birth to improve birth outcomes and reduce healthcare costs.

Lamaze International, 2025 M Street, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-3309. Phone: 202-367-1128; Fax: 202-367-2128; Website: www.lamazeinternational.org. Promotes educational programs and advocacy to support the normal birth process in women., Encourages caregivers to "respect the birth process and not intervene without compelling medical indications." (See also Prebirth.)

American Association of Birth Centers, 3123 Gottschall Road, Perkiomenville, PA 18074. Phone: 215-234-8068; Website: www.birthcenters.org. Supports a wellness model of pregnancy and birth by promoting the concept of birth centers, which are homelike care facilities operating within a health-care system designed for healthy women before, during, and after normal pregnancy, labor, and birth. (See also Prebirth.)

Infancy Organizations

Alliance for Transforming the Lives of Children (aTLC), 901 Preston Avenue, Suite 400, Charlottesville, VA 22903. Phone: 206-6664145, E-mail: info@atlc.org; Website: http://atlc.org. An alliance of organizations that promote a comprehensive blueprint for evidence-based human development principles and practices that nurture the lives of children from conception through adolescence.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP); 345 Park Boulevard
Itasca, IL 60143; Phone: 800/433-9016; Fax: 847/434-8000; Email: csc@aap.org; Website: www.aap.org. Organization of 57,000 pediatricians dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. While the AAP is unable to respond to specific inquiries (it states: "your pediatrician is the best source for child and adolescent health information"), the Website contains general information for parents. (See also Early Childhood, Middle and Late Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood.)

Children: Our Ultimate Investment, 13300 Victory Blvd., #357
Van Nuys, CA 91401, Phone/Fax: 818-332-3008; Email: admin@ children-ourinvestment.org; Website: www.children-ourinvestment.org.Founded in 1977 by Laura Huxley, this organization focuses on two programs, Financial Literacy, a school curriculum to tutor young people in money management, and Teens and Toddlers, a high school curriculum designed to prepare adolescents for the important responsibilities of parenting. (See also Prebirth, Early Childhood, Adolescence, Late Adulthood.)

La Leche League International, 110 Horizon Drive, Suite 210
Raleigh, NC 27615; Phone: 1-800-LALECHE (525-3243); Fax: 1-919-4592075; Email: info@llli.org; Website: www.llli.org. Supports breastfeeding as a highly significant component of the mother-child relationship, and breast milk as a superior nutritional food for the infant.

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau/ACYF
330 C Street S.W. Washington, DC 20201; Phone: 1-800-394-3366; Email: info@childwelfare.gov. Website: www.childwelfare.gov. Federal Agency (United States Department of Health and Human Services) established to collect, organize, and disseminate information on all aspects of child welfare. For reports of suspected child abuse or neglect, or for crisis counseling, call The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline 800-4224453 (800-4-A-CHILD), 24 hours a day. (See also Early Childhood, Late Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Prevent Child Abuse America (NCPCA), 228 South Wabash Avenue

10th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604 Phone: 312-663-3520; Fax: 312-939-8962; Email: info@preventchildabuse.org; Website: www.preventchildabuse.org; Volunteer-based coalition providing advocacy, and supporting the development of child abuse prevention programs. (See also Early Childhood, Late Childhood, Adolescence.)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 125 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038. Phone: 800-367-5437. Website: www.unicef.org. World organization that provides support to a wide range of grass-roots partners, and influences decision-makers regarding the safety, health, economic

security, and basic human rights of children around the world. (See also Early Childhood, Late Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Zero to Three: Early Connections Last a Lifetime, 1255 23rd Street, NWSuite 350, Washington, DC 20037; Phone: 202-638-1144; Toll Free (800) 899-4301; Website: www.zerotothree.org. Promotes the healthy development of the nation's infants and toddlers through advocacy, publications, training, and technical assistance.

Early Childhood Organizations

Alliance for Childhood, P.O. Box 5758, Annapolis, MD 21403, Phone: 202-643-8242; Email: info@allianceforchildhood.org; Website: www.allianceforchildhood.org. A partnership of individuals and organizations committed to fostering the natural and unhurried development of children through advocacy in areas such as education, health, and the media.

National Head Start Association, 1651 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Phone: 703-739-0875; Toll Free: 866-677-8724; Website: www.nhsa.org. Umbrella organization for the 2,500 Head Start programs in the United States.

Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc., 2228 Ball Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146. Phone: 314-432-4330; Toll Free: 866-PAT4YOU (866-7284968); Email: customerservice@parentsasteachers.org; Website: www.parentsasteachers.org. International early childhood parent education and family support program serves families throughout pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten. (See also Prebirth, Birth, and Infancy.)

Parents' Action for Children, Email: info@parentsaction.org; Website: www.parentsaction.org. Formerly the I Am Your Child Foundation, this organization promotes the physical well-being and the social, emotional, and cognitive abilities of young children so that they have the capacities they need to succeed when entering school for the first time.

Middle Childhood Organizations

Association for Childhood Education International, 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, 10th Floor Washington DC 20009; Phone: 202-372-9986; Toll Free

800-423-3563; Website: www.acei.org. Supports the optimal education and development of children from birth through early adolescence. (See also Birth, Infancy, Early Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Association Montessori Internationale/USA, 206 N. Washington, Ste. 330, Alexandria, VA 22314; Phone: 703-746-9919; Email: montessori@amiusa.org; Website: www.amiusa.org. Promotes the growth and dissemination of the teachings of Italian educator Maria Montessori in both private and public schools across the country. (See also Infancy, Early Childhood, and Adolescence.)

Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 515 Kimbark, Suite 106 Longmont, CO 80501; Phone: 612-870-8310; Website: www.waldorfeducation.org. Supports the development of Waldorf Education (based upon the work of artist/philosopher/educator Rudolf Steiner) in public and private schools from preschool through twelfth grade. (See also Early Childhood, Adolescence.)

FairTest—The National Center for Fair & Open Testing, 88 Governor Winthrop Road Somerville, MA 02145; Phone: 617-477-9792; Email: fairtest@fairtest.org; Website: www.fairtest.org. Critiques the overuse of standardized testing, and advocates the establishment of fair, open, and educationally sound methods for the evaluation of schoolchildren and working adults. (See also Early Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Midlife, and Mature Adulthood.)

National Parent Teachers Association (PTA), 1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; Phone: 703-518-1200; Toll Free: 800-3074782; Fax: 703-836-0942; Email: info@pta.org; Website: www.pta.org.The largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the United States, the PTA facilitates parental involvement in the schools, provides parent training, and advocates for the needs of school-aged children and youth in the community and through governmental organizations. (See also Early Childhood, Adolescence.)

Teaching Tolerance, Website: www.tolerance.org. Advocates for the dismantling of bigotry and the creation, as an alternative to hate and hate

groups, of communities that value diversity. Provides materials to parents, classroom teachers, and children and adolescents.

Late Childhood Organizations

Association for Middle Level Education, 4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300 Westerville, OH 43081. Phone: 614-895-4730; Toll Free: (800)-528-NMSA (800-528-6672); Fax: 614-895-4750; Email: info@amle.org; Website: http://www.nmsa.org/ Supports the educational and developmental needs of kids in late childhood and early adolescence.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2502 N. Rocky Point Drive, Suite 550, Tampa, FL 33607; Phone: 813-720-8778; Fax: 813-749-9446; Website: www.bbbs.org. Matches mentors with children who need consistent role models. Website provides listings of local agencies across the country.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 1275 Peachtree Street NE, Atlanta, GA 30309-3506. Phone: 404-487-5700; Website: www.bgca.org. Supports the establishment of neighborhood-based locations where children and youth can engage in recreational activities and have contact with positive role models as an alternative to hanging out on the streets or staying at home alone.

Adolescence Organizations

National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson University, 713 E Greenville St Suite D, #108, Anderson, SC 29621; Phone: 864-642-6372; Email: ndpc@dropoutprevention.org. Provides resources, technical assistance, training, and research on all aspects of dropout prevention programs and educational strategies to help youth succeed academically and graduate from high school.

National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens, Website: https://teens.drugabuse.gov/; This website features video games, blog posts, publications, and drug facts concerning adolescent substance abuse.

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health, 1615 M Street, NW, Suite 290, Washington, DC 20036; Phone: (202) 223-1500, Website:

https://www.thenationalalliance.org/; Dedicated to education, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy supporting long-term systemic improvements in adolescent health care and insurance coverage for adolescents. Office of Adolescent Health, 1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 700, Rockville, MD 20852; Website: https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/; Offers information about adolescent health and development, an adolescent health library of tips and fact sheets, and government sponsored research and evaluation programs dedicated to the teen years.

Early Adulthood Organizations

Association of Nontraditional Students in Higher Education (ANTSHE), 19134 Olde Waterford Rd., Hagerstown, MD 21742; Website: www.myantshe.org. Supports the improvement of services to adult learners who are going to school, working, and raising children. (See also Midlife, Mature Adulthood.)

Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education; e-mail: Diane@ smartmarriages.com; Website: www.smartmarriages.com. Clearinghouse for marriage and relationship programs. Includes articles, directory, conferences, and seminars.

Go Ask Alice! Website: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/. Sponsored by Columbia University, which provides many of the experts, this is a question and answer website geared toward young adults featuring a large database on questions related to such topics as sexual orientation, finances, substance abuse, mental health, education, and parenting.

Midlife Organizations

Midlife Boulevard, Website: https://midlifeboulevard.com; on-line magazine focusing on the lives and midlife issues of women after age 40.

North American Menopause Society (NAMS), 30100 Chagrin Blvd, Suite 210 - Pepper Pike, OH 44124; Phone: 440-442-7550; Fax: 440-442-2660; Email: info@menopause.org; Website: www.menopause.org. Promotes women’s health during midlife and beyond by providing information on peri-menopause, early menopause, menopause symptoms, long-term health

effects of estrogen loss, and therapies that promote health and fitness. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

The Midlife Club, Website: http://midlifeclub.com/. This website sponsors an active forum and chat room open 24/7, books on midlife, and resources for successfully navigating the midpoint of life.

Mature Adulthood Organizations

Administration on Aging. Website: https://www.acl.gov/about-acl/administration-aging . As part of the Department of Health and Human Services, AoA provides a wide range of services for older Americans, including home-delivered meals, transportation, adult day care, legal assistance, health information, and other services. (See also Late Adulthood.)

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 601 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20049. Phone (toll-free): 888-OUR-AARP (888-6872277); Website: www.aarp.org. The nation's largest organization of persons age fifty and over, with more than 30 million members, provides in-depth research, resources, and advocacy for older Americans. (See also Late Adulthood.)

Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel), 11 Avenue de Lafayette, Boston, MA 02111-1746. Phone (toll free): 800-454-5768; Email: contact@ roadscholar.org; Website: www.roadscholar.org. Provides travel and learning experiences in more than 150 countries for older adults. (See also Late Adulthood.)

Experience Works, Inc., 4401 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 210 Arlington, VA 22203; Phone: 703-522-7272; Toll Free: 866-EXP-WRKS (866-3979757); Website: www.experienceworks.org. Helps mature individuals enter the workforce, secure more challenging positions, move into new career areas, or supplement their income. (See also Late Adulthood.)

SeniorNet, 5237 Summerlin Commons Blvd, Suite 314, Fort Myers, Florida 33907, Phone (239) 275-2202; Fax (239) 275-2501; Website: www .seniornet.org. Nonprofit organization providing older adults with access to

computer technologies to enhance their lives and enable them to share their knowledge and wisdom with others. (See also Late Adulthood.)

Late Adulthood Organizations

The National Council of Gray Panthers Network, Social Network: https://www.facebook.com/NationalCouncilofGrayPanthersNetworks/#_=_; Founded in 1970 by social activist Maggie Kuhn, Gray Panthers was a national organization of intergenerational activists dedicated to taking on and solving the problems of peace, health care, jobs, and housing. It now exists as a network of Gray Panther groups in New York City, San Francisco, Detroit, and other cities across the U.S.

National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), c/o University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine, Department of Family Medicine and Geriatrics, 1000 South Fremont Avenue, Unit 22, Building A-6, Alhambra, CA 91803; Phone: 1-855-500-3537; Email: ncea-info@aoa. hhs. gov; Website: https://ncea.acl.gov/connectwithus/contact.html.Promotes understanding, knowledge sharing, and action on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. [Note: do not report elder abuse to NCEA. If the situation is serious, threatening, or dangerous, call 911 or the local police for immediate help]. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (formerly National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform). 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 632 Washington, DC 20036; Phone: 202-332-2275; Fax: 866-230-9789; Email: info@theconsumervoice.org; Website: http://theconsumervoice.org/. Works to improve living conditions and the quality of care at long-term care facilities (e.g., nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc.) across the country.

National Council on Aging (NCOA), 251 18th Street South, Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22202; Website: www.ncoa.org. Private nonprofit association of 3,500 organizations and individuals, including senior centers, adult day service centers, senior housing, and meal sites, to promote the dignity, self-determination, well-being, and contributions of older persons. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

National Institute on Aging, Building 31, Room 5C27, 31 Center Drive, MSC 2292, Bethesda, MD 20892. Phone: 800-222-2225; TTY: 800-2224225; Email: niaic@nia.nih.gov; Website: www.nia.nih.gov. Part of the National Institutes of Health, NIA is the primary federal agency engaged in Alzheimer's disease research and other diseases and problems related to aging. (See also Mature Adulthood.)

Death and Dying Organizations

Americans for Better Care of the Dying/Caring Community; P.O. Box 2331 Santa Rosa CA 95405-2331; Phone/Fax: 707-539-2364; Email: skeller@pacific.net; Website: www.caringcommunity.org. Dedicated to reforming health-care systems so that every person can experience comfort, dignity, and meaning at the end of life.

Compassion & Choices, 101 SW Madison Street, Unit 8009 Portland, Oregon 97207; Phone: 800-247-7421; Website: www.compassionandchoices.org. National nonprofit organization working to improve care and expand choice and options at the end of life.

Hospice Foundation of America (HFA), 1707 L Street NW, Suite 220 | Washington, DC 20036. Phone: 800-854-3402; Website: www.hospicefoundation.org. HFA is a not-for-profit organization that provides leadership in the development and application of hospice and its philosophy of care. The foundation produces an annual National Bereavement Teleconference and publishes the *Living with Grief* book series in conjunction with the teleconference.

International Association Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC), 5535 Memorial Drive, Suite F - PMB 509, Houston TX 77007. Phone: 346571-5919; Toll Free: 866-374-472 Fax: 713-589-3657; Website: www.hospicecare.com. Provides information, resources, education, and advocacy to increase availability and access to high-quality hospice and palliative care for patients and families throughout the world.

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 1731 King Street Alexandria, Virginia 22314; Phone: 703-837-1500; Fax: 703-837-1233; Email: caringinfo@nhpco.org; Website: www.caringinfo.org. Provides

state-specific living wills, and offers other services to improve the way people die in our society. Caring Connections is the only national crisis and information hotline dealing with end-of-life issues.

Beyond Death Organizations

Association for Transpersonal Psychology (ATP), P.O. Box 50187, Palo Alto, CA 94303. Phone: 650-424-8764; Email: info@atpweb.org; Website: www.atpweb.org. ATP provides education, conferences, and publications that integrate insights from modern psychology with those drawn from traditional Eastern and Western spiritual practices.

Family Search, Website: www.familysearch.org. Research your ancestors through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' online database, the world's largest family-history library.

Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), 101 San Antonio Road, Petaluma, CA 94952. Phone: 707-775-3500; Fax: 707-781-7420; Email: info@noetic.org; Website: www.noetic.org. Founded by Willis Harman, Ph.D. and astronaut Edgar Mitchell in 1973, IONS conducts and sponsors research and education into phenomena that do not fit the conventional scientific model, such as out-of-body experiences and near-death experiences, while maintaining a commitment to scientific rigor.

International Association for Near-Death Studies, Inc. (IANDS), 2741 Campus Walk Avenue, Building 500, Durham, NC 27705-8878, Phone: 919-383-7940; Website: www.iands.org. Organization devoted to the study of near-death and similar experiences and their relationship to human consciousness.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

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3 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 65.

4 For a sample of the wide range of crosscultural perspectives on the role of matter and spirit in the origins of the cosmos, see David Maclagan, *Creation Myths: Man’s Introduction to the World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

5 For contemporary disputes in psychology, philosophy, and science regarding spirit and matter, or mind and brain, see Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

6 Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child* (New York: Bantam, 1980), p. 25.

7 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Modern Library, 1992), p. 38.

8 William Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 602.

9 Quoted in G. E. Bentley Jr., *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 199.

10 Piaget actually constructed his developmental theory in part from an examination of how biological organisms adapt to their surroundings. His first papers, written in adolescence, were studies of adaptation in mollusks. See F. Vidal, *Piaget Before Piaget* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Similarly, Erik Erikson modeled his own epigenetic theory of development (known more widely as “The Eight Ages of Man”) on organic developmental processes. He writes: “. . . it is well to remember the epigenetic principle which is derived from the growth of organisms in utero.” Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Norton, 1994), p. 53. While Freud’s developmental theory has certain *rememberer* characteristics (see, for example, William B. Parsons, *The Enigma of Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999]), his use of physiological terms to describe his developmental phases (oral, anal, phallic, and genital) clearly reveals his *body up* bias.

11 For more information about the life and times of Leland Stanford, see Norman E. Tutorow, *The Governor: The Life and Legacy of Leland Stanford*, 2 vols. (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark Co.,

2004).

12 Quoted in Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *Emily Dickinson* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

13 Emily Dickinson, Poems by Emily Dickinson, Three Series, Complete, Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/12242.

14 Ibid.

15 I am indebted to Ernest Schachtel for this metaphor. See Ernest G. Schachtel, "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia," in *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention and Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), pp. 279-322.

Chapter 1

PREBIRTH: THE UNDISCOVERED CONTINENT

1 The story of the angel Lailah is taken from Howard Schwartz, *Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 57-58. Consciousness researcher Ralph Metzner has pointed out to me that in Chinese medicine a point just above the middle of the philtrum is the locus of the acupuncture point TU 26 (Jen-Chung), which is to be treated in cases of coma (i.e., to bring back consciousness). See Stephen Thomas Chang, *The Complete Book of Acupuncture* (Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1976), p. 145.

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4 M. Spehr et al. "Identification of a Testicular Odorant Receptor Mediating Human Sperm Chemotaxis," *Science* 299 (March 28, 2003): 2054-58.

5 Hildegard of Bingen, "Descent of the Soul"; miniature, about 1150 C.E., reproduced in Alvin H. Lawson, "Perinatal Imagery in UFO Abduction Reports," in Thomas Verny, ed., *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology: An Introduction* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1987), p. 271.

6 W. Y. Evans-Wentz, trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

7 Thomas Verny, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* (New York: Delta, 1981), p. 190.

8 Ibid.

9 Laura Huxley, *The Child of Your Dreams* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1992), p. 29.

10 Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 43–49.

11 R. D. Laing, "Life Before Birth," in *The Facts of Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), p. 46.

12 See National Institutes of Health, *Stem Cells: Scientific Progress and Future Research Directions* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004). It should be noted for those who prize human potential that stem cells represent the ultimate building blocks in this project from a *body up* point of view.

13 See Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1985).

14 See Stuart Campbell, *Watch Me Grow: A Unique 3-Dimensional Week-by-Week Look at Your Baby's Behavior and Development in the Womb* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004). Again, it's interesting to note that it is the lip region (the area that received the touch of the angel), that is the locus of a fetus's first neural responses.

15 Information on when different religious traditions consider personhood to begin is available online at: http://www.religioustolerance.org/abortion2.htm.

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17 See H. Eswaran et al., "Magnetoencephalographic Recordings of Visual Evoked Brain Activity in the Human Fetus," *The Lancet* 360, no. 9335 (September 7, 2002): 779-80.

18 See Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

19 See "Cinderella" in *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Bantam, 2003), pp. 79-83.

20 For an account of the aboriginal mother-fetus bond, see David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), p. 167. For an account of the Mbuti mother-fetus bond, see Colin M. Turnbull, *The Human Cycle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 33-34.

21 For an evolutionary look at how a mother's "pregnancy sickness" during the first trimester may help guard the fetus against toxic substances, see Margie Profet, *Protecting Your Baby-to-Be* (New York: Perseus, p. 995).

22 It bears mentioning at this point that there is evidence in this chapter that can be cited by either side of the abortion question. On the one hand, prolife advocates can be heartened by ample evidence of the existence of consciousness in the womb. On the other hand, prochoice advocates can cite the wealth of material in this chapter indicating that unwanted children can often look forward to a life of misery, both for themselves and for other people. Some researchers have even suggested that abortion may be related to a drop in the nation's crime rate. See, for example, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (New York: William Morrow, 2005), pp. 117–44.

23 Jean Paul Richter (trans.), *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, #837*—Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/5000.

24 Salvador Dalí, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí as told to André Parinaud*, Harold J. Salemsom, trans. (New York: Morrow, 1976), pp. 12-13.

25 See, for example, Henry P. David, Zdenek Dytrych, and Zdenek Matejcek, "Born Unwanted: Observations from the Prague Study," *American Psychologist* 58, no. 3 (March 2003): 224-29; and John J. Sigal, "Studies of Unwanted Babies," *American Psychologist* 59, no. 3 (April 2004): 183–84.

26 For studies of the negative impact of the mother's emotional, social, and physical life on the fetus, see, A. M. Jernberg, "Promoting Prenatal and Perinatal Mother-Child Bonding: A Psychotherapeutic Assessment of Parental Attitudes," in *Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine* (New York: Parthenon Publishing Group, 1988), p. 254; David B. Chamberlain, "The Sentient Prenate: What Every Parent Should Know," *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Journal* 9, no. 1 (Fall, 1994): 20-21; and Thomas Verny, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, pp. 73-95.

27 This image is shown and described in George Elder, *The Body: An Encyclopedia of Archetypal Symbolism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), pp. 10–11.

28 Later Christian writers used the term to refer to the gods of pagans (e.g., Greek and Roman deities), which is where we got the pejorative term *demon.*

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30 See Thomas Armstrong, "The Genius Within Us: Psychospiritual Guidance During Prenatal and Perinatal Development and Its Connection to Human Potential After Birth," *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health* 14, nos. 3–4 (Spring & Summer, 2000): 291–97.

31 Cited in Verny, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, p. 41.

32 Helen Wambach, *Life Before Life* (New York: Bantam, 1984), p. 42.

33 Markus Heinrichs et al., "Selective Amnesic Effects of Oxytocin on Human Memory," *Physiology and Behavior* 83 (2004): 31–38.

34 Michael Kosfeld et al., "Oxytocin Increases Trust in Humans," *Nature*, 435 (June 2, 2005): 673-76.

35 Writer and photographer Jane English suggests that cesarean-born individuals tend to be more spiritually minded than those who undergo a normal labor birth. Perhaps this is because they weren't exposed to the amnesiac oxytocin (or were exposed to less of it during an emergency cesarean birth), and thus remember more from their prebirth existence. See Jane English, *A Different Doorway: Adventures of a Caesarean Born* (Mt. Shasta, CA: Earth Heart, 1985).

36 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself #44," in *Walt Whitman* (New York: Modern Library, 1921), p. 70.

Chapter 2

BIRTH: THROUGH THE TUNNEL

1 From "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *William Wordsworth, The Complete Poetical Works.* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888); Bartleby.com, 1999. www.bartleby.com/145/. [November 15, 2006].

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5 This discussion of the physiology of birth owes much to Christopher Vaughan's book *How Life Begins: The Science of Life in the Womb* (New York: Times Books, 1996).

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9 J. A. Martin et al., *Preliminary Births for 2004: Infant and Maternal Health* (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, November 15, 2005); Catherine Deneux-Tharaux et al., "Postpartum Maternal Mortality and Cesarean Delivery," *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 108(2006): 541-48.

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13 Margaret Mead, *New Lives for Old: Cultural Transformation—Manus, 1928–1953* (New York: William Morrow, 1956), p. 345.

14 See, for example, David Meltzer, *Birth: An Anthology of Texts, Songs, Prayers, and Stories* (Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 1981).

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17 See Robert A. Bradley, *Husband-Coached Childbirth: The Bradley Method of Natural Childbirth* (New York: Bantam, 1996); and Susan McCutcheon, *Natural Childbirth the Bradley Way* (New York: Plume, 1996).

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21 See, for example, Kenneth C. Johnson and Betty Anne Daviss, "Outcomes of Planned Home Births with Certified Professional Midwives: Large Prospective Study in North America," *British Medical Journal* 330 (June 18, 2005): 1416.

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available in its entirety online at http://www.psychohistory.com.

31 Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

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Chapter 3

INFANCY: LEGENDS OF THE FALL

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"Mother-Child Expression of Distress in War Trauma," *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2005, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 135–156.

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16 Alison Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff, and Patricia K. Kuhl, *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells us About the Mind* (New York: Perennial, 2001).

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19 D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 114.

20 Joan Acocella (ed.). *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), p. 44.

21 Alison Gopnik et al., *The Scientist in the Crib*, p. 69.

22 Daniel Stern uses the term *amodal perception*, rather than unity of the senses, to describe the infant's ability to take information in one sensory modality and translate it into another sensory modality. He writes: "We do not know how they accomplish this task. The information is probably not experienced as belonging to any one particular sensory mode. More likely it transcends mode or channel and exists in some unknown supra-modal form." Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 51.

23 Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, p. 54.

24 Circe was a sorceress in Homer's *The Odyssey* who could turn men into beasts. Athena was the Greek goddess of wisdom, the arts, war, justice, and skill. Demeter was the Greek goddess of the harvest.

25 Much of the psychoanalytic literature of early childhood development, including the work of W. Fairbairn, Melanie Klein, and D. W. Winnicott, has used a mechanistic terminology to describe the psychodynamics of infancy, employing terms like "object" "part object" and "good/bad breast." See W. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Routledge, 1994); Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt, and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945* (*The Writings of Melanie Klein*, Vol. 1, New York: Free Press, 2002); D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1982). This employment of specialized professional language, while perhaps useful from a clinical point of view, seems ill suited to giving a good account of a pre-verbal stage of life that combines emotion, perception, sensation, and other categories of human experience into holistic events. The mythological terminology of Jungian psychology, while limited (infants don't literally see Greek gods) comes closest, I believe, to capturing the spirit of this time of life. See, for example, Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); and *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

26 Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, pp. 37–182.

27 Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, p. 176.

28 That the infant's amodal perception can resurface in language itself is observed time and again in the lives of highly gifted writers. Regarding color perception, writer Vladimir Nabokov wrote: "For me the shades, or rather colors, of, say, a fox, a ruby, a carrot, a pink rose, a dark cherry, a flushed cheek, are as different as blue is from green or the royal purple of blood (Fr. "*pourpre*") [is] from the English sense of violet blue. I think your students, your readers, should be taught to

see things, to discriminate between visual shades as the author does, and not to lump them under such arbitrary labels as 'red.'" Quoted in the notes to Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, Alfred Appel, Jr. (transl.) (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 364.

29 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces: Commemorative Edition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

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31 Sandor Ferenczi, *Selected Papers: Vol. III. Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1955), p. 136.

32 See David Sedgwick, *The Wounded Healer: Countertransference from a Jungian Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995); and S. Luthar and E. Zigler, "Vulnerability and Competence: A Review of Research on Resilience in Childhood," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1991, vol. 6, pp. 6-22.

33 Larry R. Vandervert, "The Evolution of Mandler's Conceptual Primitives (Image-Schemas) as Neural Mechanisms for Space-Time Simulation Structures," *New Ideas in Psychology*, 1997, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 105–123. This agrees with Jung's belief that the archetype (or *primordial image*, as he originally called it) is fundamentally an instinct, or as he pointed out, the *instinct's perception of itself:* Carl Jung, "Instinct and the Unconscious," (1919), in R.F.C. Hull (trans.) *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 8) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 137.

34 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (2nd ed). (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 25–26.

Chapter 4

Early Childhood: the Magical Mystery Years

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3 Quoted in Ian Stevenson, "The Explanatory Value of the Idea of Reincarnation," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 164 (1977): 307–308.

4 See for example, Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, 2nd ed. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980); Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, vol 1., *Ten Cases in India* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1975); and Ian Stevenson, *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003). See also a popular trade book by Tom Shroder, a *Washington Post* columnist who followed Dr. Stevenson on some of his research travels: *Old Souls: The Scientific Evidence for Past Lives* (New York: Fireside, 1999); and a book written by Jim Tucker, the current director of the program at the University of Virginia founded by Ian Stevenson: *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

5 For a voluminous compilation of similar cases, see Ian Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger Scientific Publishers, 1997).

6 Ian Stevenson, “American Children Who Claim to Remember Previous Lives,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 17, no. 1 (1983): 742.

7 Integral theorist Ken Wilber has argued that what may appear to be spiritual or transpersonal experiences in childhood are really “prepersonal” since children haven’t yet developed the ego structures (the “personal” part of “transpersonal”) that would enable them to transcend that ego. See Ken Wilber, “The Pre/Trans Fallacy,” *Re-Vision* 3 (1980): 51–72. In building his theory of consciousness, Wilber has consistently relied upon the *body up* developmental models of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and others to support his argument that early childhood belongs on a lower developmental rung in his “great chain of being” theory of consciousness (see Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, Boston: Shambhala, 2000). This highly Western and reductionistic view of childhood contrasts starkly with the statements of mystics and religious figures in virtually every cultural tradition, who view childhood as imbued with spiritual or transpersonal dimensions. For a further discussion of my argument against Wilber’s “Pre-Trans Fallacy,” see Thomas Armstrong, “Transpersonal Experience in Childhood,” *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 16 (1984): 207–30, and Thomas Armstrong, *The Radiant Child* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1988), pp. 102–11, 145–52.

8 See also Mark 10:14–15, Luke 9:47–48, Luke 10:21, and Luke 18:16–17.

9 Geoffrey Parrinder, “Charisma,” in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 3 (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987), p. 220.

10 James Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius in the Chinese Classics*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895). See Book IV, Part II, Chapter XII.

11 Edward Hoffman, *Visions of Innocence: Spiritual and Inspirational Experiences in Childhood* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), p. 4.

12 Joan Halifax, *Shaman: The Wounded Healer* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), p. 11.

13 Carl Jung, “The Psychology of the Child Archetype,” in R. F. C. Hull (trans.), *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 9, part 1, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 179. See also C. Kerényi, “The Primordial Child in Primordial Times,” in *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 25–69.

14 Heinz Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1980), pp. 72-74. Originally written in the 1940s, this book still stands as one of the truly great achievements of developmental psychology, despite its being largely forgotten by the mainstream psychological community. What makes it remarkable is that it portrays early childhood development as alive and dynamic, and provides numerous examples of child reports that give a sense of life from the child’s point of view. Most current research in child development, on the other hand, fails to capture the inner life of early childhood, providing instead a scientific analysis that dissects the world of childhood into empty categories and lifeless models seen from the vantage point of rational adults.

15 This experience of synaesthesia can persist into adulthood. See, for example: Richard E. Cytowic, *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

16 Patricia A. Paine, “Eidetic Imagery and Recall Accuracy in Preschool Children,” *Journal of Psychology* 105, no. 2 (1980): 253–58.

17 Quoted in Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (New York: Dover, 1995), p. 60.

18 See, for example, Erol F. Giray et al., “The Incidence of Eidetic Imagery as a Function of Age,” *Child Development* 47, no. 4 (1976): 1207-10.

19 Ben Johnson, ed., *My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla* (Williston, VT: Hart Brothers, 1982). The full text of Tesla's biography is available at several sources on the Internet.

20 Quoted in Virginia Haggard, "Life with Chagall," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1996.

21 Quoted in Dore Ashton, ed., *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 104.

22 It should be noted here that Piaget in his early years was quite interested in psychoanalysis (and thus, the phenomenology of the unconscious), and even spent some time in therapy with one of Carl Jung's female disciples, Sabina Spielrein. See Fernando Vidal, "Sabina Speilrein—Jean Piaget—Going Their Own Ways," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 46, no. 1 (2001): 139-53. Over time, however, his interests increasingly focused on matters of mathematics and logic, to the detriment of these researches into the rich inner life of the child.

23 Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1975), p. 212.

24 Ibid., p. 210.

25 Translated and interpreted by William Buck, *Mahabharata* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), p. 204.

26 See, for example, David Watkins, *Morality and Architecture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

27 Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experience of Childhood* (Oxford: The Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, 1977), pp. 32-33.

28 Quoted in Frances Wickes, *The Inner World of Choice* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 83.

29 Patricia L. Ryan, "Spirituality Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Violence: A Literature Review," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 30, no. 1 (1998): 39–51.

30 See, for example, Jerome L. Singer, "Imaginative Play in Early Childhood: A Foundation for Adaptive Emotional and Cognitive Development," *International Medical Journal* 5 (1998): 93-100.

31 D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 14.

32 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

33 John M. Chernoff, "Music-making Children of Africa," *Natural History* 88 (1979): 75.

34 Derek Bickerton, "Creole Languages," *Scientific American*, July 1982, p. 116.

35 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 173.

36 Quoted in Sir David Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, vol. 2 (Chestnut Hill, MA: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001), p. 407.

37 Quoted in Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 93.

38 See J. S. Rubin, "The Froebel-Wright Kindergarten Connection: A New Perspective," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 48, no. 1 (March 1989): 24–37.

39 Quoted in K. C. Cole, "Play, by Definition, Suspends the Rules," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1988, p. C16.

40 The phenomenon of adults retaining childhood playfulness (as well as children's synaesthesia, eidetic imagery, physiognomic perception, etc.) is called *neoteny* (Latin for "holding youth"), a term that is used in referring to physical characteristics in the field of developmental biology. For the importance of this process in the evolution of species, see Ashley Montagu, *Growing Young* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).

41 Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys as Culture* (New York: Gardner Press, 1986).

42 There is growing evidence that the demise of play may be related to an increase in hyperactivity and ADD/ADHD-related symptoms in our culture. One neuroscientist, Jaak Panksepp, has suggested, for example, that the absence of rough-and-tumble play among boys may play a key role in the frontal lobe/limbic system dysfunctions seen in ADD/ADHD behaviors. See, for example, Jaak Panksepp, "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders, Psychostimulants, and Intolerance of Childhood Playfulness: A Tragedy in the Making?" *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 7 (1998): 91–98; Thomas Armstrong, "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in Children: One Consequence of the Rise of Technologies and Demise of Play?" in Sharna Olfman, ed., *All Work and No Play: How Educational Reforms Are Harming Our Preschoolers* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), pp. 161–75; and Thomas Armstrong, "Canaries in the Coal Mine: The Symptoms of Children Labeled 'ADHD' As Biocultural Feedback," in Gwynedd Lloyd, David Cohen, and Joan Stead, eds., *Critical New Perspectives on ADHD* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2006).

43 Marian Diamond and Janet Hopson, *Magic Trees of the Mind* (New York: Dutton, 1998), p. 54.

44 H. T. Chugani, "Critical Importance of Emotional Development: Biological Basis of Emotions: Brain Systems and Brain Development," *Pediatrics* 102, no. 5 (November 1998): 1225–29.

45 See Paul Thompson et al., "Growth Patterns in the Developing Human Brain Detected Using Continuum-Mechanical Tensor Mapping," *Nature* 404, no. 6774 (March 9, 2000): 190–93.

46 Psychoanalyst Ernest Schachtel writes that human beings have developed a special amnesia for early childhood experiences in part to protect the culture from these possibilities: "Childhood amnesia covers those aspects and experiences of the former personality which are incompatible with the culture. If they were remembered, man would demand that society affirm and accept the total personality with all its potentialities. In a society based on partial suppression of the personality such a demand, even the mere existence of a really free personality, would constitute a threat to the society. Hence it becomes necessary for the society that the remembrance of a time in which the potentialities of a fuller, freer, and more spontaneous life were strongly present and alive be extinguished." See Ernest G. Schachtel, "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia," in *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention and Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1959) p. 320.

47 Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).

48 Child Welfare Information Gateway, Child Maltreatment 2016: Summary of Key Findings, *Numbers and Trends*, July 2018. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/canstats.pdf.

49 Quoted in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Constance Garnett (translator), Christian Classics Ethereal Library. http://www.ccel.org/d/dostoevsky/karamazov/karamazov.html.

50 Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 67.

51 Frances G. Wickes, *The Inner World of Childhood* (New York: Mentor, 1968), p. 39.

52 For a discussion of past and current trends in thinking regarding homosexuality and psychoanalysis, see Ralph E. Roughton, "Rethinking Homosexuality: What it Teaches Us About Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 50, no. 3 (2002): 733-63.

53 Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 7.

54 Paul Okami, Richard Olmstead, Paul R. Abrahamson, "Sexual Experiences in Early Childhood: 18-Year Longitudinal Data from the UCLA Family Lifestyles Project," *Journal of Sex Research* 34, no. 4 (1997): 339–47.

55 Elaine Hatfield et al., “Passionate Love: How Early Does It Begin?” *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 1, no. 1 (1988): 35–51.

56 Alison Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff, Patricia K. Kuhl, *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us About the Mind* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2000), p. 49.

57 One can see a good example of this inner psychic phenomenon in Günter Grass’s Nobel Prize-winning novel *The Tin Drum.* In this novel, little Oskar uses his drumming and his glass-piercing scream to express his ultra sensitivity to the people and events around him during the Nazi era in Germany. See Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

58 Wilhelm Reich, *The Children of the Future: On the Prevention of Sexual Pathology* (New York: Noonday Press, 1984).

59 Heinz Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development,* p. 360.

60 Bryant Furlow, “Play’s the Thing,” *New Scientist*, no. 2294 (June 9, 2001).

Chapter 5

Middle Childhood: Entering the Civilized World

1 Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child Matures* (New York: Dutton, 1985), p. xiii.

2 Rebecca Fraser, *The Brontës: Charlotte Brontë and Her Family* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988), pp. 49–61.

3 Sadly, Branwell’s adult life was marked by unstable employment, alcoholism, drug addiction, and an early death from tuberculosis at the age of thirty-one. Tuberculosis would also kill Emily two months later (after having caught a cold at her brother’s funeral), and Anne the following year.

4 Robert Silvey and Stephen MacKeith, “The Paracosm: A Special Form of Fantasy,” in Delmont C. Morrison, ed., *Organizing Early Experience: Imagination and Cognition in Childhood* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1988). See also David Cohen and Stephen A. MacKeith, *The Development of Imagination: The Private Worlds of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1992).

5 It is true, of course, that some cultures decide that such entities should remain part of the objective world as the child grows up. These *rememberer* cultures are usually branded as “primitive” by an *adapter* culture such as ours.

6 Thomas Buckley, “Doing Your Thinking,” *Parabola* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 31.

7 Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

8 Piaget’s research has undergone substantial criticism over the past three decades, questioning both his methodology and his conclusions. Critics suggest, for example, that children often respond differently to a Piagetian activity when a question or situation is put in a slightly different way. They also claim that Piaget underestimated young children’s cognitive abilities and envisioned the processes of cognitive growth as occurring much more smoothly and consistently than is actually the case. See, for example, D. F. Bjorklund, *Children’s Thinking: Developmental Function and Individual Differences*, 2nd ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1995). Others have argued that Piaget’s work has a clear male bias and underplays the importance of early empathy and cooperation in young children’s behaviors. See, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Having said this, however, it still remains true that many of Piaget’s conclusions about the general processes of cognitive growth from early childhood to middle childhood are still regarded as foundational in contemporary education and cognitive psychology.

9 Jean Piaget, “Development and Learning,” in R. E. Ripple and V. N. Rockcastle, eds., *Piaget Rediscovered* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1964), p. 12.

10 The experience of remembering mathematical operations recalls Plato's Meno dialogue, where he takes a boy (probably of adolescent age) through the steps of the Pythagorean theorem, demonstrating that the boy has within him all the knowledge needed to understand the concept. As Plato points out to his interlocater Meno, "his soul must have always possessed this knowledge." *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Bantam, 1986), p. 213.

11 Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision: A Study of the Religious Experience of Childhood* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), pp. 27–28.

12 Edward Robinson, *The Original Vision*, p. 115.

13 Adapted from Edvard Grieg: "My first success". Original manuscript in Bergen Public Library. http://www.troldhaugen.com/default.asp?kat=19&sp=2. This type of experience, signaling an opening to a newly found ability, has been termed a "crystallizing experience," by psychologist David Feldman. See Joseph Walters and Howard Gardner, "The Crystallizing Experience: Discovering an Intellectual Gift," in R. J. Sternberg and J. E. Davidson, eds., *Conceptions of Giftedness* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 306–31.

14 Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 1997), p. 307.

15 Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man* (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 288.

16 J. Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 12.

17 In David Shribman, *I Remember My Teacher: 365 Reminiscences of the Teachers Who Changed Our Lives* (Kansas City, KS: Andrews McMeel, 2001), p. 134.

18 "20th Anniversary Celebration: About Oprah," *O, the Oprah Magazine*, October 2005.

19 Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 252.

20 Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, p. 34.

21 Rudolf Steiner, *The Kingdom of Childhood* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1982), p. 20.

22 Sigmund Freud, "Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex," in A. A. Brill, ed., *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Modern Library, 1966), pp. 582-85.

23 William N. Friedrich et al., "Normative Sexual Behavior in Children: A Contemporary Sample," *Pediatrics* 101, no. 4 (April 1998): 9.

24 Dorothy Corkille Briggs, *Your Child's Self-Esteem* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 143.

25 Iona Opie, Peter Opie, and Marina Warner, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2000), p. 1.

26 A. C. Harwood, *The Recovery of Man in Childhood* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), p. 75.

Chapter 6

Late Childhood: Becoming a Part of the Crowd

1 Frances G. Wickes, *The Inner World of Childhood*, p. 163.

2 The original story is "The Frog-King, or Iron Henry," in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 17–20.

3 This tale has some remarkable similarities with an incident that occurs in Homer's *The Odyssey.* At one point in his journey, Odysseus lands on an unknown island after a shipwreck and, being totally exhausted, falls into a deep sleep. The next morning, a princess named Nausicaa and her

maids come down to a river near the place where Odysseus is sleeping to wash the princess's clothing. After they have finished their work and hung the clothes up to dry, the girls relax and play a game that involves throwing and catching a ball. Eventually, someone misses catching the ball and it lands in a swirling pool of water. Upset by the loss of the ball, the girls shriek loudly in distress. This wakes up Odysseus who proceeds to make the acquaintance of the princess. The princess, who is attracted to Odysseus and would like to be his wife, directs him to her father's castle. Once admitted into the kingdom, Odysseus is honored with a feast and proceeds to tell the king and his followers a great part of the story of his trying to get back home to Ithaca. See Homer, *The Odyssey* (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 168–78.

4 Cris Beam, "Encouraging Loyalty to Friends," *Parenting*, September, 2006, p. 202.

5 Naturally, the future poets, mystics, psychics, artists, and philosophers of the world likely will experience *remembering* during late childhood (and be classed as often as not as "misfits," "dreamers," or worse, as noted in this chapter). But this stage of life as a whole represents a time when the child's need to *adapt* to his surroundings reaches a peak, and it comes just before the turbulence of adolescence blasts a large hole in the psyche allowing cosmic concerns to reemerge.

6 Martha K. McClintock and Gilbert Herdt, "Rethinking Puberty: The Development of Sexual Attraction," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 5, no. 6 (December 1996): 178–83.

7 Quoted in McClintock and Herdt, "Rethinking Puberty," p. 178.

8 Ryan MacMichael, "First Kiss," *The Daily Ping*, June 7, 2001, http://www.dailyping.com/archive/2001/06/07/.

9 Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova* (New York: Penguin, 1969), pp. 29–30.

10 H. T. Chugani, "Critical Period of Brain Development: Studies of Cerebral Glucose Utilization with PET," *Preventive Medicine* 27, no. 2 (1998): 184–88.

11 Marian Diamond and Janet Hopson, *Magic Trees of the Mind*, pp. 55–56.

12 J. N. Giedd et al., "Brain Development During Childhood and Adolescence: A Longitudinal MRI Study," *Nature Neuroscience* 2 (1999); 861–63.

13 Quoted in Curt Suplee, "Key Brain Growth Goes on into Teens," *Washington Post*, March 9, 2000, p. A1.

14 Quoted in J. N. Giedd et al., "Brain Development During Childhood and Adolescence," p. 863.

15 Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988) p. 11.

16 Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Dover, 1996), p. 7.

17 Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 89.

18 Quoted in Janet Sayers, "Teenage Dreams: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Adolescence," *Signs* 25, no. 3 (Spring 2000).

19 Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. 262.

20 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words* (New York: Fawcett, 1964), p. 131.

21 Barbara Leaming, *Orson Welles: A Biography* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 16.

22 See Jeanne S. Chall and Vicki A. Jacobs, "Poor Children's Fourth-Grade Slump," *American Educator* (Spring 2003). http://www.aft.org/pubsreports/american_educator/spring2003/chall.html.

23 Anne Grosso de León, "Moving Beyond Storybooks: Teaching Our Children to Read to Learn," *Carnegie Reporter* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 1.

24 See Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind*: *The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

25 For information on how to translate the theory of multiple intelligences into practical learning strategies that can meet the needs of different kinds of learners, see Thomas Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Plume, 1999); Thomas Armstrong, *In Their Own Way: Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Penguin/Tarcher, 2000); Thomas Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000); Thomas Armstrong, *The Multiple Intelligences of Reading and Writing: Making the Words Come Alive* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003); and Thomas Armstrong, *You're Smarter Than You Think: A Kid's Guide to Multiple Intelligences* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2003).

26 For my own criticisms of school labels, see Thomas Armstrong's *In Their Own Way*, and *The Myth of the A.D.D. Child: 50 Ways to Improve Your Child's Behavior and Attention Span without Drugs, Labels, or Coercion* (New York: Plume, 1997).

27 There have been a number of recent books that have discussed children who seem to fit this description of *rememberer* children in at least some ways. See, for example, Lee Carroll and Jan Tober, *The Indigo Children* (Flagstaff, AZ: Light Technology Publishing, 1999); Doreen Virtue, *The Crystal Children* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2003); and Georg Kuhlewind, *Star Children: Understanding Children Who Set Us Special Tasks and Challenges* (Forest Row, England: Temple Lodge Publishing, 2004).

28 For a look at research that has examined the creative abilities of individuals with disability labels, see Bonnie Cramond, "Attention-deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Creativity: What is the Connection?" *Journal of Creative Behavior* 28, no. 2 (1994): 193–210; Thomas West, *In the Mind's Eye: Visual Thinkers, Gifted People with Dyslexia and Other Learning Difficulties, Computer Images, and the Ironies of Creativity* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997); and Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures: And Other Insights from My Life with Autism* (New York: Vintage, 1996). For an excellent website that provides links to numerous papers and articles on this topic, see: http://www.neurodiversity.com.

29 Victor Goertzel and Mildred George Goertzel, *Cradles of Eminence: A Provocative Study of the Childhoods of Over 400 Famous Twentieth-Century Men and Women* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1962), p. 249.

30 In Milton Cross and David Ewen, *Milton Cross' Encyclopedia of the Great Composers and Their Music*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), pp. 315–16. This "paralyzing experience" contrasts sharply with Grieg's "crystallizing experience" described in Chapter 5. Fortunately, Grieg had mentors that encouraged him to develop his musical abilities into maturity so that this gift was not lost to humankind. One wonders, however, how many artistic works, scientific discoveries, intellectual contributions, or spiritual gifts have been lost to us because of a teacher's or parent's paralyzing words.

31 Goertzel and Goertzel, *Cradles of Eminence*, p. 257.

32 See Judith Rich Harris, *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

33 Anu Varma, "The Lost Girls: Pity Sarasota's Preteen Girls, Who Too Often Know Everything About Sex and little About Happiness," *Sarasota Magazine*, Summer 2003, p. 60.

34 Press release: "Girls Can Internalize Negative Body Images Even in Pre-Adolescence," Center for the Advancement of Health, March 7, 2001. http://www.hbns.org/newsrelease/girls3-7-01.cfm. At the same time, fueled by the fast-food industry, the media, and other social factors, there is an obesity epidemic running rampant through the childhood and adolescent years that threatens to set the scene for serious health problems in later life. See, for example, Cara B.

Ebbeling, Dorota B. Pawlak, and David S. Ludwig, "Childhood Obesity: Public-health Crisis, Common Sense Cure," *The Lancet* 360, no. 9331 (August 10, 2002): 473–82.

35 In some cases, the symptoms of ADHD (hyperactivity, impulsivity, and distractibility), are nothing more than the gender-appropriate behaviors of healthy boys and would have been considered perfectly normal fifty years ago. See Thomas Armstrong, *The Myth of the A.D.D. Child*, pp. 31–32.

36 Philip C. Rodkin et al., "Heterogeneity of Popular Boys: Antisocial and Prosocial Configurations," *Developmental Psychology* 36, no. 1 (January 2000): 14–24.

37 George Jowett was one of the first men to popularize weightlifting in the early part of the twentieth century. The schoolyard bully from my past grew up to become an Emmy Award-winning soap opera star who played the role of an abusive lawyer on daytime television for over twenty-five years. My parents did not buy me the weightlifting equipment. I currently work out with weights at my local fitness center.

38 Timothy Egan, "For Image-Conscious Boys, Steroids are a Powerful Lure, *The New York Times*, November 22, 2002, pp. A1, A22.

39 S. J. Young, S. Longstaffe, M. Tenenbein, "Inhalant Abuse and the Abuse of other Drugs," *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* 25, no. 2 (1999): 371–75.

40 Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, June 1989), p. 8.

41 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover, 1994), p. 157.

42 Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, p. 245.

43 Michael Thompson, with Catherine O'Neill Grace and Lawrence J. Cohen, *Best Friends, Worst Friends: Understanding the Social Lives of Children* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), pp. 59–62.

44 Ibid, pp. 60-61.

45 Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (New York: Ballantine, 1993), p. 2.

46 Sydney Ladensohn Stern, *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1997), p. 35.

47 Quoted in Janet Sayers, *Boy Crazy: Remembering Adolescence, Therapies, and Dreams* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 67.

Chapter 7

ADOLESCENCE: ADVENTURES IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

1 Robert Museil, *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 444.

2 There has been some concern that girls are reaching puberty at an earlier age than in the past. It's been estimated, for example, that in the 1830s in England the average age for the onset of menarche was 17. Today, the average age of menarche in the United States is around 12 years, six months, and it is common to hear of girls beginning to show signs of puberty as young as 6 or 7. Different theories have been advanced to explain this downward shift, from insecticides and hormones in food products, to better nutrition, obesity, and stress. See Daniel Goleman, "Theory Links Puberty to Childhood Stress," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1992, and Theo Colborn, Dianne Dumanoski, and John Peter Meyers, *Our Stolen Future: How We Are Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival* (New York: Plume, 1997).

3 Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (New York: Bantam, 1993).

4 Paula Weideger, *Menstruation and Menopause* (New York: Knopf, 1975).

5 See, for example, James H. Stein and Lynn Whisnant Reiser, "A Study of White Middle-Class Adolescent Boys' Responses to 'Semenarche' (the First Ejaculation)," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 23, no. 3 (June 1994): 373–384; and Loren Frankel, "'I've Never Thought About It,' Contradictions and Taboos Surrounding American Males' Experiences of First Ejaculation (Semenarche)," *Journal of Men's Studies* 11, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 37–54.

6 Janet Sayers, *Boy Crazy: Remembering Adolescence, Therapies, and Dreams*, p. 72.

7 S. Shipman, "The Psychodynamics of Sex Education," in R. E. Muuss, ed., *Adolescent Behavior and Society: A Book of Readings* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 333–34.

8 A. A. Adegoke, "The Experience of Spermarch (the Age of Onset of Sperm Emission) Among Selected Adolescent Boys in Nigeria," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 22 (1993): 201–209.

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12 See, for example, P. M. Thompson et al., "Growth Patterns in the Developing Brain Detected by Using Continuum Mechanical Tensor Maps," *Nature* 404, no. 6774 (March 9, 2000): 190–93. Contrary to popular belief, it is not so much the direct influence of hormones on the body that is associated with the emotional turbulence of puberty, but the impact that these hormones have on the development of the brain. Surges of testosterone at puberty, for example, swell the amygdala, an almond-shaped part of the limbic system (emotional brain) that generates feelings of fear and anger. Similarly, estrogen seems to affect serotonin levels at puberty, accounting for higher rates of depression among teenage girls. See C. L. Sisk and D. L. Foster, "The Neural Basis of Puberty and Adolescence," *Nature Neuroscience* 7 (September 27, 2004): 1040–47; J. N. Giedd et al., "Quantitative MRI of the Temporal Lobe, Amygdala, and Hippocampus in Normal Human Development: Ages 4–18 Years," *Journal of Comparative Neurology* 366, no. 2 (1996): 223–30; and L. Born, A. Shea, and M. Steiner, "The Roots of Depression in Adolescent Girls: Is Menarche the Key?" *Current Psychiatry Reports* 4 (2002): 449–60.

13 Research suggests that the lateral prefrontal cortex, which is important for controlling impulses, is among the latest brain regions to mature without reaching adult dimensions until the early twenties. J. N. Giedd, "Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Adolescent Brain," *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* 1021 (2004): 77–85.

14 Kaspar Kiepenheuer, *Crossing the Bridge: A Jungian Approach to Adolescence* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1990), p. 4.

15 While today's teens may appear to be going through a less turbulent adolescence than teens at other historical or cultural periods (e.g., the Cultural Revolution in China and the antiwar generation in America in the late 1960s), this may be more artifice than reality, screened as it is by the veneer of a "perky" consumerist, market-based, *adaptive* culture. The many problems of adolescents in today's society (e.g., binge drinking, eating disorders, depression, vandalism, gang violence, addictions) may be better indicators of what's going on beneath the surface.

16 Frances G. Wickes, *The Inner World of Childhood* (New York: Mentor, 1968), p. 108.

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a rite of passage ceremony. The photo's caption reads: "Having been exposed both to a broiling sun and to a torment of stinging insects sprinkled over them, those with short white sticks at their heads have expired." See Joseph Campbell, *Historical Atlas of World Mythology*, vol. 1, *The Way of the Animal Powers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 144.

19 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Education for the 21st Century," *Education Week*, April 19, 2000, p. 46.

20 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Kevin Rathunde, and Semual Whalen, *Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 196.

21 See, for example, Gini Sikes, *8 Ball Chicks: A Year in the Violent World of Girl Gangs* (New York: Anchor, 1998); and Sayika Shakur, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2004).

22 LSD seems to be a drug of *remembering*. The research scientist Albert Hofmann, who discovered LSD in 1943, said that his first experience of the drug was identical to a childhood mystical experience that he had at the age of ten. See Craig S. Smith, "Nearly 100, LSD's Father Ponders His 'Problem Child,'" *The New York Times*, January 7, 2006. While I have not used illegal drugs since adolescence, nor do I advocate the use of any illegal drug today, it seems possible to argue that there are drugs of *remembering* (LSD, mescaline, peyote, psilocybin, ayahuasca, etc.), and drugs of *adapting* (Ritalin, Prozac, Ambien, Viagra, etc.). Our *adapter* culture permits (and even encourages through media ads) the use of *adapter* drugs, while prohibiting by law the use of *rememberer* drugs. In indigenous *rememberer* cultures, however, *rememberer* drugs are often an integral part of their sacred rituals, while *adapter* drugs are largely unknown. For a recent Johns Hopkins University study that compared an *adapter* drug (Ritalin) with a *rememberer* drug (psilocybin) in their ability to trigger a mystical experience, see R. R. Griffiths, W. A. Richards, U. McCann, and R. Jesse, "Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance," *Psychopharmacology* 187, no. 3 (August 2006): 268–83.

23 In the past twenty years there have been a number of community efforts to create intentional rites-of-passage programs for adolescents to help them craft their own identities within their particular culture. See, for example, Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster, Meredith Little, eds., *Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation* (Chicago: Open Court, 1987); Louise Carus Mahdi, Nancy Geyer Christopher, and Michael Meade, eds., *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996); Mary C. Lewis, *Herstory: Black Female Rites of Passage* (Chicago: African American Images, 1988); Paul Hill, *Coming of Age: African-American Male Rites-of-Passage* (Chicago: African American Images, 1992).

24 Quoted in Janet Sayers, *Boy Crazy: Remembering Adolescence, Therapies, and Dreams* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 117. It should be noted here that such charismatic individuals, when they are themselves undeveloped, may end up being simply another class of "omni-impotent" parental archetypes that must be confronted and overcome; and this is certainly the case with many popular cult leaders. See Margaret Thaler Singer, *Cults in Our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

25 Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia* (New York: Ballantine, 1995), p. 254.

26 I have not yet seen any credible authority link Piaget's stage of formal operations with the spike in brain growth that occurs at about this same time, but it seems to me that this would be a topic worthy of further investigation.

27 This is different from the exploration of possibility described in the chapter on early childhood. Adolescents do not need to incorporate fragments of reality from the external world into their

possible worlds in the way that young children do when they play. They're capable of laying the foundations for their possible worlds entirely in abstract thought.

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30 Quoted in Edward Lucie-Smith, *Joan of Arc* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 15.

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32 Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Renascence and Other Poems* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2005), pp. 2, 8.

Chapter 8

Early Adulthood: Building an Independent Life

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29 In the first volume of his history of sexuality, philosopher Michel Foucault, who was gay, made a point of emphasizing the heterosexual genital bias in Western culture. He wrote: “. . . from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described . . . Were these anything more than means employed to absorb, for the benefit of a genitally centered sexuality, all the fruitless pleasures? All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction—Volume 1* (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 36–37.

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Selection: Results from 5 Populations (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996); David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Gina Cerminara, *Many Mansions: The Edgar Cayce Story on Reincarnation* (New York: Signet, 1990).

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38 Levinson and Levinson, *The Seasons of a Woman's Life*, p. 301.

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40 Lynn Olson, "Bridging the Gap," *Education Week*, January 26, 1994, p. 21.

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43 Meher Baba was a Parsi (a Zoroastrian who lived in India) who lived from 1894 to 1969 and claimed to be the reincarnation of Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed. He kept silence for the last fifty years of his life. For a biography about his life and work written by a disciple, see C. B. Purdom, *The God-Man: The Life, Journeys, and Works of Meher Baba with An Interpretation of His Silence and Spiritual Teachings* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1964). I was initially drawn to Meher Baba in December 1970 after listening to a record album dedicated to him by his most famous devotee, Peter Townshend of the rock group The Who: "Happy Birthday" (London: University Spiritual League/Eel Pie, 1970).

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Chapter 9

MIDLIFE: MOVING THROUGH MUDDY WATERS

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32 Leo Tolstoy, *Confession* in Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/tolstoy/confession.html. Tolstoy's midlife crisis of meaning was prefigured almost two decades before in the principal male character of *War and Peace,* Pierre Bezukhov, as this passage illustrates: ". . . dark thoughts of the vanity of all things human came to him oftener than before . . . everything seemed to him insignificant in comparison with eternity; again the question: for what? presented itself. . . ."; Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace,* Aylmer Maude (trans.), Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2600.

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Chapter 10

MATURE ADULTHOOD: SCALING THE PEAKS

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Chapter 13

Beyond Death: Travel to Other Lands

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Conclusion

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